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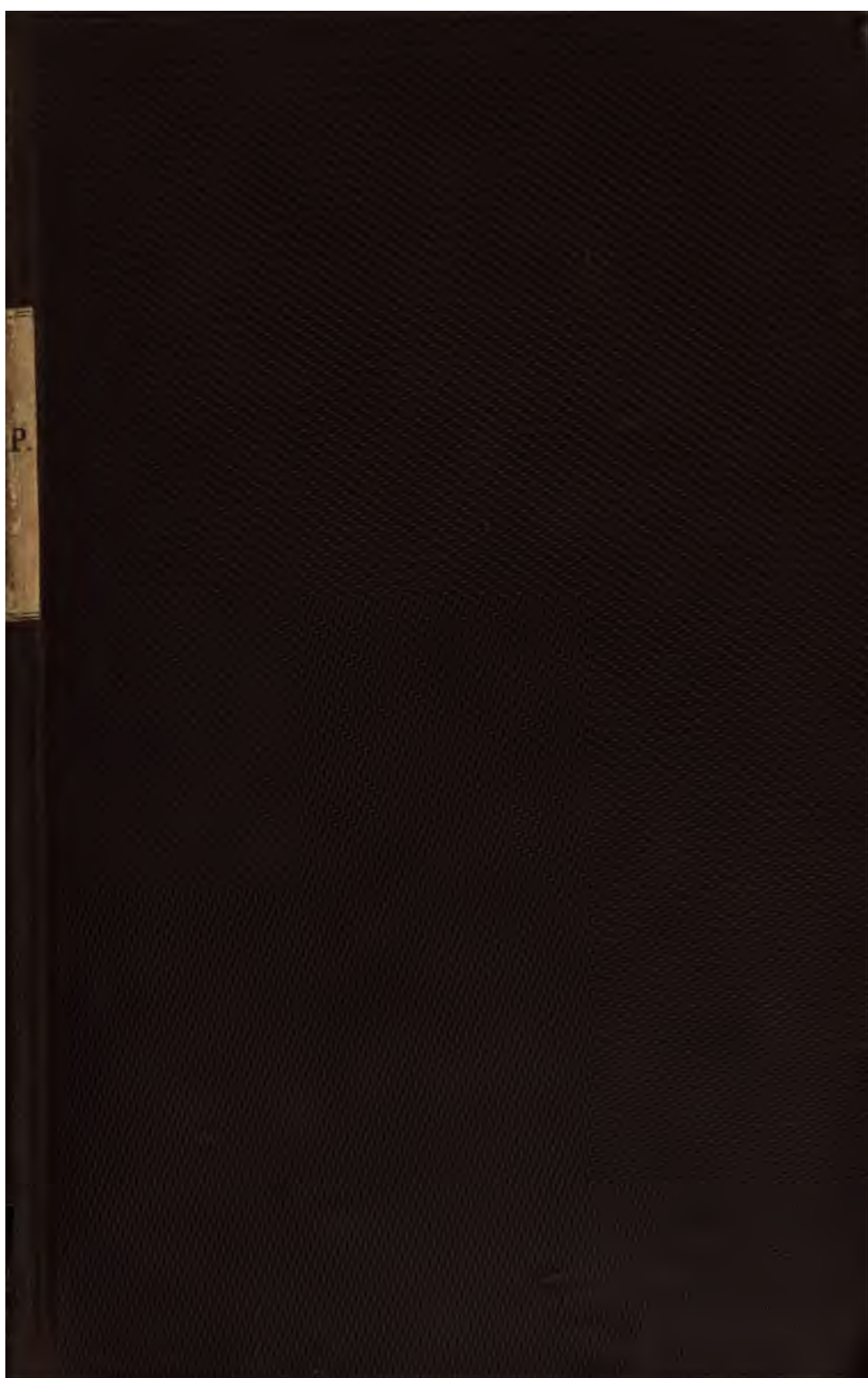
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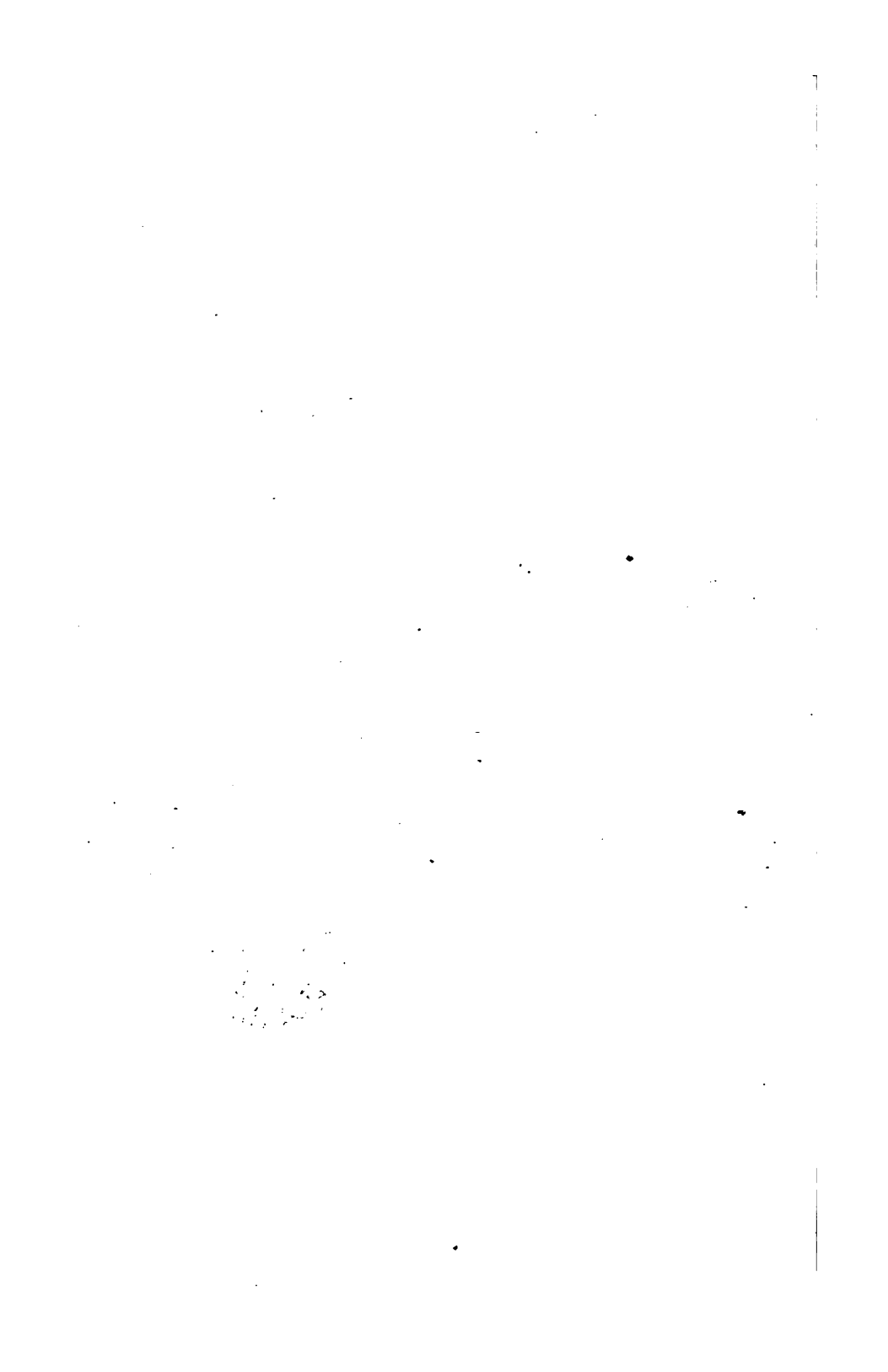




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THE STORY  
OF  
MY WARDSHIP.

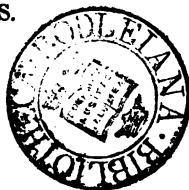
BY MARY CATHERINE JACKSON.

"Looks of familiar love, that never more,  
Never on earth our aching eyes shall meet,  
Past words of welcome to our household door  
And vanish'd smiles, and sounds of parted feet—  
Spring! 'midst the murmurs of thy flowering trees,  
Why, why revivest thou these?"

MRS. HEMANS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TO  
JAMES AUGUSTUS ST. JOHN, ESQ.,

I DEDICATE

"THE STORY OF MY WARDSHIP."

IT IS AN HUMBLE OFFERING,

BUT I TRUST HE WILL ACCEPT IT

AS A SLIGHT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF

KINDNESS RECEIVED AT HIS HANDS,

AND AS A GENUINE TRIBUTE

OF RESPECT, ADMIRATION AND ESTEEM

OFFERED TO

THE ELEGANT AUTHOR OF

"ISIS."





THE STORY  
OF  
MY WARDSHIP.

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CHAPTER I.

"Thou unrelenting past !  
Strong are the barriers round thy dark domain,  
And fetters sure and fast  
Hold all that enter thy unbreathing reign.

\* \* \* \*

My spirit yearns to bring  
The lost ones back—yearns with desire intense,  
And struggles hard to wring  
Thy bolts apart, and pluck thy captives thence."

BRYANT.

I WAS born beneath a tropical sky—in a fair island of the West.

My young eyes saw nature in her richest dress—in her most splendid robes. No haze veiled the sunlight, no fog obscured the distant landscape; but clear, bright, and

gorgeous was the scene on which the being new to this world gazed with the wondering eyes of childhood ; and deep into her soul pierced the golden rays of the Sun-God, flooding it with dreams, warm as the breath of love.

It was a soft, indolent, careless existence, that child-life of mine ; sleeping through the noontide heat—or listening half awake to the splash of water in the fountain, conjuring up fantastic tales, and indulging in the poetic reveries of a young, untutored spirit—driving out in the still, sweet evening, watching the lengthening shadows, and the moon silently assuming her reign ; with no work, no toil of mind, or of body, a young Sybarite should I have become, but for the early ride on horseback to see the sun rise above the cold, blue mountains.

In the tropics this grand sight is worth the exertion of rousing yourself from slumber, and after the sultry heaviness of night, the dewy freshness of morn is actually necessary for restoring your mental and bodily powers.

The Day-God comes indeed like a king, robed in crimson and gold : he rises from his

couch, and the purple shadows unfold like curtains before him ; he thrones himself in rosy splendour, and a glorious sight it is to witness his ascent to his throne in the heavens.

But before that—ere the portals are opened through which he enters, the earth is beautiful : there is a dewy tenderness pervading all nature—a delicate something which wraps her round as modesty does a young virgin ; you feel and see that there is much to be revealed, much to be brought out, and you long, though tremblingly, to see the development of her embryo charms.

And presently her God appears, awaking her to a new life ; the beauties of Dawn, like those of Maidenhood are gone, but in their places arise others ; matron gold replaces virgin silver : the misty veil is lifted, streaks of light, nay more, of warm sunshine gild the mountain peaks, burnishing them into splendour ; and down the slopes, and along the broad savannahs stream the golden rays like smiles.

The heavens are tinted gorgeously, and the earth, and the full rivers, and the eternal

floods reflect the hues: even mist is coloured—nothing so thin, so ethereal but the deep, rich staining of that glowing atmosphere can reach it. Abstractions become sensuous, and our very thoughts are as it were tangible.

These mornings are amongst my earliest recollections; and with the memory of them mingles remembrance of my silver haired father, an elderly man of martial bearing and aristocratic countenance, who was wont to take me on his knee, and patting my head caressingly, call me, with a sigh, his “little Isola;” it was at this early morning hour that I used to see most of him, his occupations preventing my seeing much of him at any other time. I remember, too, a gentle, soft-mannered woman, whose face though dark, was yet paler than the faces of those around her—my kind nurse Inez. She would sing to me in a foreign tongue—in the rich, sonorous language of Spain; indulge me in every childish whim, and endeavour to make me as indolent and ease-loving as herself, whilst we sat in the verandah, or wandered listlessly in the plantation which surrounded my father’s house.

And the birds of brilliant plumage, and the superb flowers, and the luscious fruits, how well can memory recal the impression they made upon my childish mind ! Giving to my fancy a richer colouring, to my thoughts a deeper glow.

My father occasionally gave large parties—gentlemen's dinner parties, the company at which consisted chiefly of military men, by whom I was petted and spoilt to my heart's content : many civilians, however, shared the hospitality of my father, and amongst the latter was one man, who from my earliest years had inspired me with a singular aversion.

Short, red-headed, and ill-made, his appearance alone was unpleasing ; but combined with his oily manner, and a certain sinister glance which, whenever it rested upon me, filled me with dread, he was almost repulsive. He was, nevertheless, a frequent guest at our house, and seemed to possess a strange influence over my father ; child as I was, I felt it likewise, and most unpleasantly : often have I stolen from the room when he was smiling with his false smile at my father's side—

there was something in it which seemed to sting me, and I would fly to the bosom of my loving Inez.

And then came death. I knew not the full meaning of that solemn word then, but it was like a cold shadow passing between me and the sun. I saw my father one morning sauntering in the verandah, and tying up the large cactus which had been thrown into disorder by the night wind—in the evening at gun-fire, he was taken away cold and white upon his bier, and I saw him no more.

He had held a high command in the island, and numerous were the attentions I received from the families comprising the society there, when my sad loss was known.

I was wild with grief—I wept—I stormed, and refused to be comforted, angrily repulsing those who addressed to me the ordinary expressions of sympathy; till my kind Inez took me to her heart, and mingling her tears with mine, soothed me sweetly. She talked to me of my beautiful mother in heaven, and said my father had joined her there, and that together they would pray for their little one left behind on earth; and then she brought her rosary,

and prayed by it, and then she prayed to the Virgin for the repose of the soul of my parents; poor Inez! and I, in my simplicity prayed with her earnestly and hopefully.

I next found myself placed under the care of a brother officer of my father's, who was returning with his wife to England, and remember being seen on board ship by the man whose sinister smile I so detested, and feeling thankful that I was to see his unpleasant face no more.

The voyage home was like other voyages, so I shall not describe it: the passengers were all very kind to the young "orphan," as I heard myself called; but in spite of their kindness and the excitement of new scenes, child as I was, I could not forget my griefs—the loss of my father, and the parting from my beloved Inez.

From the conversation of the passengers, I learned several particulars concerning my family and position, which interested me exceedingly. I had never before thought of asking myself who I was, and it was pleasant to have the question answered as soon as put. I was told that I was descended from an old



family, which in every period of English history had sent forth members to distinguish themselves in the senate and in the field.

My father's name having been down at the Horse Guards as a candidate for a commission, almost as soon as he was born, at twelve years of age he was a lieutenant ; and so rapid was promotion in those days of bloody battles and hard campaigns, that he obtained his company at fifteen, without having ever joined his regiment.

At seventeen, his education considered complete, he joined ; served in the Peninsula and at Waterloo—enjoyed the days of revelry which followed—became well known at the Court of George the Fourth, and married into a noble family.

However, as the lady did not live many years, and left no children, it is needless entering into particulars respecting the first Lady Brand.

Some months after his wife's decease, my father was ordered to the West Indies with his regiment, and satiated with the sameness of Court gaiety, he was not sorry to find himself changing the scene.

He soon grew weary, however, of life in the tropics, and only reconciled himself to it by making frequent excursions to the Spanish main.

To Mexico—a glorious country, though peopled by an enervated race, he went with enthusiastic feelings; which were further increased by his there meeting with a being who realized his boyish visions of woman in her loveliest form.

The Donna Isola de la Vega became the object of his passion—he wooed, and won her from her reluctant parents—they were married.

The same sad story so often told of fondest love, and joy most thrilling, to be quenched in bitterest tears, was enacted now; for ere a few months had elapsed—short! O so short, they seemed to the wedded lovers! I was born—and my young mother died.

Such was the tale related to some of my fellow-passengers by one who had seen and known my mother, “and a glorious creature she was,” he added, in conclusion.

I conjured up her image in my mind—this bright young creature, and connected it with all that is sunny and fair on earth; and as I

did so, I looked backward ever on the silvery track we left behind with a fond regret at leaving the land of sunshine and summer.

Vain repining! our gallant vessel was bravely ploughing the broad bosom of the Atlantic, and before us lay the cold northern region, where henceforth was to be my home.

We arrived in London on a gloomy day in November.

How dull and sombre everything looked! the leaden sky—the dingy houses—the dirty streets—the dark dresses!

Dreary—dreary I felt when I found myself on the evening of a wretched day, newly arrived at the house of the guardian to whose care I was consigned by my father's will—at the residence of Lord D'Arville in Berkeley Square.

Lady D'Arville had fetched me from the hotel to which I had gone with my friends, and had given me in charge to her maid to be fed and dressed, “and the child can come down after dinner,” her ladyship added.

I accordingly went down with a fluttering at my heart, and a choking in my throat, to see the being who henceforth was to stand to

me in the place of a father. In Lady D'Arville I had already been disappointed : with feelings brimming over, I gazed upon her on being introduced, and I saw a little fair woman with a dollish face and silly smile—an insignificant, mindless woman : still with my full heart, panting to love and to be loved, I rushed into her arms. She said gently she was very happy to see me, and touched my cheek with her lips.

My guardian would welcome me more heartily perhaps—how I trembled as I descended the stairs to the dining-room—what a hot flush came over me as I entered the apartment !

The first glance chilled me.

Lord D'Arville was a very tall, thin, straight man of equivocal age ;—he was at the turning point—the “ *béau jeune homme*,” transforming into a clever piece of art.

• Once, no doubt he had been considered good-looking—his features certainly were handsome, but they were too set in their expression, and set into a cold hard form.

His manner on greeting his young ward, though intended perhaps to be kind, was so

constrained—the effort to do “what was proper” under the circumstances was so apparent, that it had the effect of making me feel placed in a very uncomfortable position.

I could have wept, but something froze the tears at their fountain head, they seemed to be congealed round my heart.

The dessert being on the table, Lady D'Arville languidly asked me what I would take, and left it to her lord to attend upon me; then after a few questions relative to my passage, and “the people” I came over with—alluding to the friends who had brought me, the conversation turned upon topics I knew nothing about, or ceased altogether.

I had leisure for noticing my guardian, at times, when he was addressing her ladyship.

Children are admitted to be good physiognomists, and though I could not have expressed my feelings then in words, yet, the impression made upon me on this my first interview with my guardian was as correct—the knowledge I was insensibly imbibing of his character as true, as now, after years of experience.

I fear I stared very hard at him, as I sat

there absorbed in my speculations upon this man who stood to me in my father's place, and that an inkling of what was passing through my mind, occurred to him, for he very soon suggested to Lady D'Arville the probability of my being fatigued, and the bell being rung, I was conducted to my sleeping apartment.

On the following day, I was ordered into "the presence" for inspection.

Lady D'Arville coolly surveyed me through her lorgnette, and commented upon my dress and appearance without reserve, while my guardian subjected me to a catechetical examination which in no wise raised me in his opinion.

I was asked what I could do, and questioned as to the extent of my acquirements. They were readily summoned up.

I knew the names of all the beautiful trees, and lovely flowers of the tropics—all about birds of gay plumage, and curious insects—animals, snakes, shells; indeed, my knowledge of natural history was somewhat extensive.

I could tell tales of the pirates of the

Caribbean sea, and talk of Montezuma, and the great "past" of Mexico, interspersing my account with stories of the grandees of old Spain; and I could play my tiny guitar, and sing to it "Tra-la-las," taught me by Inez.

"No, no, no quiero casarme  
Que es mejor—que es mejor  
Ser solterra  
Y siempre placentera  
Del mundo—del mundo gozar.

"Amantes—amantes constantes  
Se encuentran—se encuentran  
Muy pocos,  
Y muchos que locos  
La suelen—la suelen pegar.

"Se muestran, se muestran rendidos  
Se ostentan, se ostentan afables  
Y se hacen amables  
Por solo, por solo en ganar.  
No—no—no," &c.

This was one of many. When questioned however upon the ordinary knowledge familiar to children of my age in England, I disclosed profound ignorance.

"The child is a perfect little savage!"

exclaimed my guardian, upon my informing him that I knew nothing about Alfred the Great, or Canute ; the Wars of the Roses, or the French Revolution.

“ She has evidently been left in the care of these slave-devils, and allowed to run wild. I’m afraid we shall have some trouble with her.”

“ It is the case with all these West Indian children,” said Lady D’Arville, “ and I consider it a real affliction, that she should have been left to our care. However, I positively cannot be annoyed, and must request you to arrange everything in such a manner as to spare my feelings.”

Accordingly, a governess and masters were soon found ; and in the ordinary routine of the school-room, varied by promenades in the square, or park, my days passed, until two or three years after I first became an inmate of my guardian’s house.

A continental tour then being projected, I accompanied Lord and Lady D’Arville as far as Geneva, and was there left *en pension*, while the noble couple proceeded on their journey.



## CHAPTER II.

"Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains  
They crowned him long ago  
On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,  
With a diadem of snow."

MANFRED.

SWEET—beautiful Geneva! like a dream of heaven is the first view of its enchanting loveliness! Couched on the brink of the far famed blue lake, its glistening spires are seen like a bright beacon, guiding you to the spot, where it lies embosomed in beauty; while above and around rise soft green mountains, backed by others growing purple in distance, and crowned by snowy diadems.

Slowly — slowly descending the Jura, I gazed upon those giants of the earth—the mighty Alps, pointing their white fingers to

the sky—their glittering pinnacles piercing the blue empyrean—their crests erect, as they were monarchs surveying from their calm, cold heights, the feverish struggles in the restless spirit of man. I gazed on them, and on others more distant, fading softly into light feathery clouds in the hazy horizon—mingling with the skies—melting into heaven.

The soul rose with them as if she too, would fain pierce the regions of air, and a feeling, grand—almost God-like swelled the heart, which seemed too small to fulfil its functions; it panted to give vent to the flood of thoughts and sensations awakened by the scene, but sighs and tears were the only exponent of emotions, deep—undefinable, and most sweet.

It was the bright, summer time when I arrived, and the aged head of Mont Blanc was reflected in the clear lake-waters as in a crystal mirror: the gardens skirting the borders of the lake were blooming with roses—the villas that studded the banks were nestled in foliage, and each looked, in itself, a Paradise.

Geneva, dear old town, had stuck forward

a row of staring warehouses, as if ashamed of the quaint, tumble-down, rickety, romantic-looking "quartiers" in the back-ground; and seemed like an antiquated old lady, puzzled by the wild antics of a certain boisterous boy—the Rhône—whose "blue-rushing" washes down her bridges, undermines her houses, and commits all the mischief of a mad young river.

The "pension" at which I was placed, was prettily situated on the Lausanne Road, and its extensive grounds commanded fine views of the range of Alps—those grand old Alps!

I grew years older in gazing upon them, never wearying of contemplating their giant forms, towering their hoar heads to the skies, tier beyond tier—rivalling each other in their upward ambition; and linked with them in thought, were certain snowy peaks once seen, in the Western Hemisphere—dim recollections of early childhood.

Summer and winter passed away—and again and again the seasons danced their round: the gates of knowledge were unfolded to me, and the shining path stretching its

interminable length far away into mystic regions, lured me swiftly on.

It was a happy time—the mind was busily laying up stores in its garner-house, and in the heart dwelt purity and peace.

Lord and Lady D'Arville were still travelling: they had visited Germany, Hungary, and Greece, making a lengthened séjour in every place of interest, and at last repaired to Italy. This was all the information I received respecting them, or their movements—a bald account, but considered sufficient for a child.

At length, my guardian made his appearance at Geneva alone. He looked searchingly at me when I enquired, as I felt in duty bound, for Lady D'Arville, and knitting his brow, made some indistinct reply.

I thought him more disagreeable in manner than ever, and when I found that the purpose of his visit was to make arrangements for my leaving Geneva, and repairing to Paris, for the finishing of my education, I could scarcely restrain my rebellious feelings—but the fiat had gone forth, and a friend of my guardian's—the Honourable Mrs. Dash-

ington, being just then at Geneva, *en route* for Paris, it was arranged that I should travel thither under her care, Lord D'Arville preceding us.

The time quickly came for my departure : how my heart ached ! the mountains had never looked so blue, so high, so beautiful ! The lake seemed more pellucid—the sloping margin greener than ever.

I went down to the boat-house, bid a tearful adieu to Madeleine, the *blanchisseuse*—wandered in the gardens, lingered amongst the flowers, went upon the ramparts, and watched [for the last time the pretty little green lizards disporting themselves in the sunshine—visited the Ile de Rousseau, where so often I had sat for hours ; and said farewell to the “ arrowy Rhône,” as to a friend.

And then came a parting sad indeed—from those dear beings, who were my only friends on earth !

Was it for ever ? for ever ?—that word so rife with bitter meaning ? Impossible—the young heart cannot realize such a severance from creatures blithe and full of life like itself.

Somewhere, in the long, long years which form the mysterious avenue to the tomb—somewhere in the sunlighted places of that far-reaching path, they must meet again.

“Adieu !” cries the world-new spirit, “but not—oh !—not for ever !”

\* \* \* \*

On the summit of the lofty barrier—the frowning Jura, which parts the land of glaciers and of torrents from the sunnier plains of France, I turned to take one last glance.

The sun was setting grandly, suffusing those Alpine peaks with a glory as of heaven : they gleamed in the sunny hues, looking like molten gold—but while regarding them, they changed, and a faint blush as of melted roses spread over them ; and then those cold, cold giants seemed incarnadined, endued with animal life.

But again a change : rose deepened into crimson, shades of blue crept in, transforming red into violet, and gradually the grey tints of twilight spread over the scene.

At length, coldly and clearly cut, those

snowy pinnacles and ridges stood out in pale lustre, against the deep, dark blue of night; suggesting the thought of hoary and honourable age gazing fearlessly into the unfathomable, solemn depths of Eternity.

We turned an angle, and were in one of the gloomy passes of the Jura.

I sank into a corner of the carriage, and trusting to the preoccupation of my companions preventing my emotion being noticed, gave way to a fit of weeping.

The said companions were the Honourable Frederick and Mrs. Dashington, and the latter being equivalent to both, I must place her first in my notice of them.

She was a handsome, showy looking woman, who might have been easily taken for an actress, or a milliner, but for a stupid, inane expression of face, which made you doubt her capacity for fulfilling the requirements of either of the above professions.

She looked as if she had come into the world, to be carried through it entirely by the exertions of others—that the mere act of breathing was as much as could reasonably be expected of her; and even this, judging by

the frequent use of smelling-bottles to which she resorted—throwing up of windows, and panting, was too much for her delicate organization. She seemed afraid of giving herself wrinkles by allowing her features any play, and guarded herself as carefully from sun and dust as if she had been made of biscuit china, instead of being solid, substantial matter, calculated by nature for encountering similar grievances. Having honoured me with very particular observation when her large eyes fell upon me for the first time, she appeared to think all further notice unnecessary, and resorted to a basket of books which she had in the carriage for amusement, after placing one of them—a trashy novel into my hand.

When, however, she saw that I had been weeping, she was good-natured enough to endeavour to rally me, by telling me I was a silly child, and that I should ruin my eyes, “*Ils sont des beaux yeux, n’est-ce pas ?*” she added, turning to Mr. Dashington.


The gentleman, who had the honour of being husband to the handsome Mrs. Dashington, was a middle aged man inclined to corpulency, a sort of vulgar George the Fourth in appear-



ance: he slept and snored the greater part of his time, but invariably woke up for meals, and by his grumbling then, and an occasional grunt in answer to any observation from his wife, his presence was kept in remembrance.

I felt sadly *de trop* with this couple, and no doubt I was so in reality. My age was an awkward one for Mrs. Dashington; had I been a young woman, she might have felt interested in initiating me into the mysteries of that world in which she moved, but an unsophisticated school-girl could be only a nuisance to a person of her mould of mind—a girl possessed of *feelings* too! unpleasant attributes which Mrs. Dashington liked to meet with only in novels.

There they could not be painted too strongly; indeed she never cared to read any work in which they were not strained to a most unnatural point: it was necessary she said to have something to excite one in a book—it was all very well to talk of “literary merits,” and “good writing,” and “good taste,” and so on, but she must have something “uncommon”—something highly spiced to gratify her morbid appetite; and I noticed that the



more a book teemed with extravagancies, indelicacies, and glaring absurdities, the more highly she prized it. I have since found that this lady was only one of a large class.

For scenery, Mrs. Dashington did not care at all—shivered at the sight of naked rocks, and misty mountains—declared our day in old Dijon the stupidest she had ever spent in her life, and turned from the beautiful, smiling scenery of the Côte d'Or with a regretful sigh that we were so long in getting to Paris.

At last, her stock of novels exhausted, she seemed inclined to notice me; and on the afternoon of our second day's journey, she showed symptoms of wishing to engage me in conversation, and after a little while, some remark being made relative to my guardian, I ventured to ask her why Lady D'Arville had not accompanied her lord on his late visit to Geneva.

"My dear Miss Brand," she said, opening her saucer-like eyes a little wider than usual; "you must never mention that unhappy person's name in *'ears polite.'* Is it possible you have not heard of her—her very silly conduct! I thought all the world knew it, but I

suppose in that out-of-the-world region in which you have been vegetating, the scandal of society has not reached you."

"What has her ladyship done?" I asked innocently; various sins between shoplifting and murder suggesting themselves to my mind.

"O, she has been acting in the silliest way possible:—I never knew anything worse managed, and of course her husband will have to get rid of her—little foolish thing. It's a sad blow to poor dear D'Arville."

I was as wise as ever, and Mrs. Dashington seeing my simplicity, which must have been refreshing to her, was pleased to enlighten me.

"Some people thought her pretty," she began, "I never did, but tastes differ: however, when the D'Arvilles were staying at Milan, it was quite the fashion to admire the English miladi, and perhaps it's not to be wondered at so much, for the Milanese women are reckoned the ugliest in creation, and she certainly had the merit of being fair and fresh-looking—it would have been strange, indeed, if she had not been admired there. But the head of the

little creature—goose, I should call her—was quite turned by the flattering attentions she received, and, of course, as all the ladies do in Italy—it's the custom of the country, and is thought nothing of, she chose a 'cavaliere servente,' a Count something—forget his name—a fiery little man of volcanic temperament, the very opposite of that noble, dignified, splendid fellow, Lord D'Arville. Nothing could be more mortifying to a husband than such a preference, and as was very natural under the circumstances, he forbade her ladyship seeing the man again; and what did the little wretch of a woman do, but actually went off with this mean, contemptible Italian Count. She'll die of starvation, I dare say, and it will serve her right: for conceive anything more annoying to a man like Lord D'Arville, than on his return home from 'La Scala' one night, to find his wife gone off. He was furious, I believe, and set the police to work; and it is rarely that any one eludes those Austrian police; however, by some means or other this couple did, and they have not succeeded in tracing them yet."

It seemed to afford Mrs. Dashington great gratification to give these particulars of the delinquency of one of her own sex, and although I put no question, nor made any remark upon the subject, she continued.

"As a matter of affection, it is nothing at all; it would be ridiculous to suppose that D'Arville ever cared a sou for the insipid little woman—a mere puppet at the best, but in his position, a man looks so foolish whose wife leaves him in that ridiculous way; and he must be at the trouble of hunting her up, and getting a separation, and I don't know what; and just now he has so many other things to think of—I suppose you know he has been appointed to a diplomatic service—some special affair."

It was thus I became informed of the D'Arville doings; and presently received a hint relative to my own prospects.

"Well, Miss Brand," said Mrs. Dashington, "this news has not affected you as I expected it would, for it will make all the difference to you, of course, in your position as Lord D'Arville's ward, whether he has a wife or not."

"I dare say he will marry again," I said.

Mrs. Dashington started a very little, and lisped "possibly," sotto voce.

\* \* \* \*

Arrived in Paris, I was soon settled there to the satisfaction of all parties, and as my time passed in much the same manner as that of other young ladies going through an educational course, it is needless dwelling upon that period of my existence: it was unvaried by any circumstance of interest save one, but this one, as it made some impression on my mind, should be recorded.

It happened that on several occasions when walking with my companions in the Champs Elysées, under the surveillance of our gouvernante, I observed a man, whose attention seemed rivetted upon our little party, and upon myself in particular.

He would pass us again and again, and each time, his eye would rest upon me with a searching glance, which awoke in me some strange, long dormant feelings.

I puzzled my brain to imagine where and when I had met that malevolent gaze before,

and for a long time could not succeed in unravelling the mystery.

At length, one day, it so chanced that my sandal breaking, I stopped for a moment to arrange my disordered *chaussure*, and on looking up, I found that my companions had all gone on, and that I was alone. No—not alone, at my side stood the man whose marked observation had so perplexed and annoyed me.

I rose quickly, and hurried on, but in my confusion turned down the wrong avenue, and did not perceive till I had advanced a considerable distance, that none of my friends were in sight: I was conscious, however, of being followed—more, that at my side walked my tormentor.

“Why are you hurrying on so fast?” he said, and the tones of his voice, and his English language, sounded unpleasingly familiar; “I wish to speak to you—to ask you a question or two. Is not your name Brand—eh? Isola Brand?”

I did not reply.

“Really, Miss Brand,” the man began after a few minutes’ silence, during which I had

been vainly trying to get a glimpse of my party. "Really this is a very great pleasure to me, to see you once more ; but it is not very flattering to find that you have lost all recollection of me—of one of your earliest friends."

"Sir!" I exclaimed haughtily—memory having been busy recalling the face at my side, and succeeded in its endeavours: "if I can remember Mr. Sniggleby as a guest of my father's, I do not remember him as one of my 'earliest friends.'"

"Dear me! what a strange young lady you must be, Miss! why now, I thought it would give you great pleasure to have a chat over old times."

"So it would—but—"

"It would affect your feelings too much, I suppose."

There was something in the manner of this Mr. Sniggleby so repulsive, that much as I should have liked to recal scenes and persons to mind, dear to my childhood, I had no inclination to do so with this man, and still looking about in search of my companions, I remained silent.

Unaffected by my manner, however, Mr.



Sniggleby, assuming a confidential tone, continued to address me.

"Do you remember your ma at all, Miss?"

"No, Sir."

"You don't? that's curious too."

"Not at all, considering that she died at my birth."

Mr. Sniggleby looked into my face with a cunning expression of countenance, and then laughed in a manner which I construed as derisive; but checking any demonstration when he saw my surprise and perplexity, he said quickly.

"Have you seen your guardian lately?"

I replied in the negative.

"A fine gentleman, isn't he?"

I made no answer, but growing more and more annoyed at this persecution, and perceiving with dismay that I was wandering further and further, in which direction I did not know, I stopped short, and asked Mr. Sniggleby abruptly, to direct me towards the Arc de l'Etoile.

"You needn't be in such a hurry," he remarked, "you're quite safe with me, and I'll accompany you."

It was useless my declining his services, or protesting against his officiousness ; he listened unmoved to every thing I said, and still walked on with me till we arrived at the Barrière.

On reaching this well-known spot, I turned to him and said civilly, that I could dispense with his further attendance ; but passing my arm through his, and retaining it there with a strength I could not resist, he hailed a *vigilante*.

"I must just drive you to Mrs. Sniggleby's—she'll be so pleased to see you after so many years," he said.

"It is impossible, Sir," I cried, "I have already incurred the displeasure of my gouvernante, no doubt, and must hasten home."

"O—nonsense, I'll arrange all about that,—come—you'll be tired to death walking."

I still resisted, and he became more persuasive in manner—told me I was looking pale and ill, "and that I had better take his advice."

"Then will you go direct home?" he said at length.

I hesitated, and the driver of the *vigilante*

seemed in a hurry, and muttered something about another fare.

"Come, what nonsense this is, Miss—get in;" cried Mr. Sniggleby, and he pushed me rudely towards the vehicle. Frightened and faint I was on the point of obeying him, not knowing what else to do—my foot was on the step—when I perceived to my infinite delight the bronzed face of François the porter of our house. I uttered a cry of joy, and Mr. Sniggleby at the same moment swore an oath.

"François—take me home," I cried.

"Oui—oui—Madm'selle—on vous demande à la maison. Madame est presque hors d'elle—on vous cherche partout."

"What does that jabbering Frenchman say?" asked Mr. Sniggleby.

"Est-ce que Monsieur va louer ma voiture—ou non?" shouted the irate driver of the vigilante—"est-ce, qu'on me rit au nez?—peste!—sa-cré-é-é" and muttering his annoyance, drove off.

Mr. Sniggleby, unable to stop him, looked discomfited and enraged, for there was no

other vehicle on the stand; and with an expression difficult to describe upon his disagreeable countenance, he saw me walk off under the care of François.

This adventure alarmed me not a little, and long afterwards my dreams were nightmares: I was haunted by the vision of a pair of reddish, ferret-like eyes with weak sore lids—a shapeless nose—and sensual lips, the portals to a cavernous mouth,—the face of Mr. Sniggleby:—and I was puzzled to think what could have brought the bug-bear of my early years, across my path again.

## CHAPTER III.

"A single stream of all her soft brown hair  
Pour'd on one side: the shadows of the flowers  
Stole all the golden gloss, and, wavering  
Lovingly lower, trembled on her waist—  
Ah, happy shade—and still went wavering down,  
But, ere it touch'd a foot, that might have danced  
The greensward into greener circles, dipt,  
And mixed with shadows of the common ground!  
But the full day dwelt on her brows, and sunn'd  
Her violet eyes, and all her Hebe-bloom,  
And doubled his own warmth against her lips,  
And on the bounteous wave of such a breast  
As never pencil drew."

TENNYSON

EVERY man no doubt has felt, though  
may not be candid enough to admit the  
that he could frequently derive greater  
sure from the society of a friend who  
neither too refined, too clever nor too g

than from the companionship of one who possesses all those advantages in an ultra degree. One with whom he always feels on tenterhooks, and before whom he is unwilling to display his temper—his joy—his sorrow, or his spleen.

Vanity may be at the root of this, but however it may be, it is certainly true; and elevating and ennobling, as it may be to the mind to look upwards in our friendships, it is often easier and pleasanter to the *heart* to love those, before whom we do not shrink from laying bare our foibles—those weak erring beings, whose faults and follies have in like manner been laid open to us.

This is a long preamble, but it explains the satisfactory nature of the feeling experienced, when, upon my return to England—my education completed, I was forwarded like a parcel by Mrs. Dashington, under the care of a trustworthy person, to Serle Park.

The said park was the residence of Lady Bernard, an aunt of Lord D'Arville's; and with the old lady, dwelt her niece, Rose Bernard; between whom and myself an

intimacy of the easy kind, I have denoted, immediately sprung up.

She was a round, doughy, squeezable little thing, with a tiny foot, which seemed made for tripping it in a fairy dance, and a small, white, plump, dimpled hand, which I used to think very bewitching : she looked at you out of kind, womanly eyes of a pale blue fringed with dark lashes, and in the voluptuous laziness of her manner, there was something which charmed while it provoked one.

Wilfulness was written on her face, in spite of the placidity of its expression : there it was—the reed which would bend in policy, but would not break.

Still, she was a loveable creature, with all her naughty ways ; and, a great point in a woman, essentially feminine : there were no hard lines, angles, or points in her exquisitely rounded form, but nicely turned, round, and full, her little figure was perfect.

I call her little, because her eyes just reached my chin, but she herself would have felt anything but flattered at being so designated, having always understood herself to be a “ fine girl,” in the sense in which you

apply the term to any production either of the animal or vegetable kingdom, and Miss Bernard certainly was solid and substantial, as well as symmetrically proportioned.

She was a tender, soft, flower-like thing, with a delicate bloom on cheek and lip, and her long, silky ringlets of umber brown, had a way of winding-like tendrils round your finger if it came in contact with them :—there was something almost loving about those curls.

No stronger contrast between forms feminine could have been found, than was presented between my companion and her aunt, Lady Bernard; the younger, downy and gentle as a dove, when the little imp ‘temper’ was not at home,—the elder, a starch, stiff dame of bony construction—a sort of anatomical specimen of an old lady, with a pale, bloodless face, and cold grey eye; thin lips, not kiss-inviting, and a set, stern style of features which recalled tales of Roman matrons and Spartan mothers. It was easy to imagine her like them, buckling on the armour of her sons, and bidding them go forth—“to conquer or to die.”



She was very tall and still erect, with a firm, almost martial step and stately carriage, in spite of having the weight of seventy winters to support ; and the remembrance of sorrows—hinted at occasionally, which would have bowed down many another.

If she felt at all, her feelings were well regulated—she kept her heart, as she did her chronometer, regularly wound up and attended to : she did not allow it to play her any tricks or indulge in any vagaries ; it kept its proper time, and the pendulum wagged to and fro with a monotonous movement which would have driven me distracted.

Occasionally, however, Lady Bernard gave evidence of feeling : you could tell by the contraction of the brow when she was displeased, and by the blanching of the lip when she was incensed ; sometimes, too, she exhibited pleasurable emotion, when a smile would play round her wiry lips, but it was only a streak of winter sunshine, which quickly faded away.

Her “nephew” was the peg on which she hung all her interest in life—his position and respectability constituted hers, and if she

possessed any affection in her nature, upon him it was bestowed ; but it was a hard, stiff sort of feeling, well fitted for its object.

I never felt at home with Lady Bernard. I do not think she liked my foreign origin, and habits, and to a certain extent—ideas ! She always spoke disparagingly of everything that was not English : she could not understand the enthusiasm of my character, nor enter into my feelings upon any subject, and I believe that, in some respects, she considered me almost heathenish.

Sometimes, too, she talked in a manner I could not quite understand ; but which, nevertheless, was very unpleasant, about certain social vices common in the West Indies ; spoke sneeringly about ‘half-castes,’ and ‘mulattos,’ and ‘mixed races,’ saying, *she* liked ‘pure blood,’ &c. Strangely too, she seemed to confound my Mexican mother with a slave girl, or, at least, a coloured servant.

On these occasions, the sneering look of Mr. Sniggleby would come to mind, and I would feel my face crimsoning with confusion. The life we led at Serle was dull enough,

and I was glad when at length a prospect of variety came.

Rose and I were sitting in the breakfast-room, which opened into the entrance hall, and as the tall shadow of Lady Bernard fell across the room, through the window as she passed it, we were led to expect her joining us, and so it was.

She first placed a small basket which she had in her hand, where it might be seen and removed by the gardener: she had apparently been pruning and trimming shrubs, for it was full of dead leaves and twigs, and she entered the room scissors in hand, and with her gardening gloves on.

A gaunt figure she looked—so large and bony, with a black silk drapery hung round her which was innocent of crinoline, or any other deception: a fur tippet circled her neck, and an old garden bonnet cast its shade over her face.

She held a letter in her hand, and seating herself in a chair, she drew her spectacles from her pocket, and adjusting them carefully on her nose, making the while a sort of *sifflement*, between her teeth—it was almost too

soft to be called "whistling," but it partook of the nature of that accomplishment—she commenced reading.

Rose looked up once or twice whilst her aunt was so employed, and her knitting seemed very badly managed afterwards, she dropped several stitches, and exhibited great awkwardness in taking them up again, considering the amount of practice she had in the matter.

"Well, girls," said Lady Bernard, when the letter had been read and refolded, "here's an invitation for you to Compton."

"Oh! indeed!" said Lady Rosa softly, and ducked under the table after a ball of worsted which she had in her lap.

"I don't see much use in going," continued the old lady, "it's such an ill-regulated house, they keep all sorts of hours, lying in bed till mid-day and sitting up all night, that it's exceedingly uncomfortable; and they fill every nook and cranny so with company, and especially with men, that it's like a barrack—all racket and riot, no peace or quiet."

Rose was silent, so was I.

The *sifflement* was resumed, and the

old lady walked to the window, and back again.

"I really don't think it safe," she said at length, "taking two young girls like you to such a house as Compton, with all those ill-disposed men about—don't know what harm may come of it."

I fairly laughed outright now, while Rose turned alternately white and red, and her fingers moved nervously about her work.

"You need not fear for me, Lady Bernard," I said, "I promise to conduct myself most decorously, and I'm quite sure Rose will."

"Mrs. Compton will think it very unkind if you don't go, aunt," remarked Rose timidly.

A pause ensued, during which I felt exceedingly curious to know the result of the old lady's cogitations, but she only said, after appearing to reflect some time.

"Well, I'll think of it, though if Mrs. Compton is so exceedingly desirous of seeing me, she ought to keep better hours; but she's a poor, weak-minded woman—has no strength of character whatever, and knows no more how to conduct an establishment, and

rule a family, than a doll : her children will be ruined I know, if they're not ruined already ; as to that Leila, indeed, Heaven knows what they expect her to come to ! I never saw a girl allowed so much license in my life,—in *my* time it wouldn't have been considered respectable, but times are strangely altered," and she twirled her thumbs, and recommenced the *sifflement*.

Rose fidgeted about a good deal, "and may I answer the note and say 'yes,' Aunt Bernard?" she asked.

"Wait a little—I'll tell you by and bye : I don't think the horses are equal to the journey just now, so worked as they have been lately."

The horses having been out more than usual on my account, I felt this remark as, if not exactly levelled at me, yet intended as a hint that I was not to advocate their being called upon for the task of drawing us to Compton ; so could of course say nothing in favour of this fresh expedition ; but having often heard Rose speak of Compton as "a dear interesting old place," and its inmates as "darling ducks," I felt exceedingly desirous

that Lady Bernard should accede to her niece's wish of accepting the invitation.

I was just at that transition age, when,

"Like the swell of some sweet tune,  
Morning rises into noon,—  
May glides onward into June."\*

I mean the age of Juliet—approaching fifteen, when the heart is most open to impressions, and its sense of pleasurable enjoyment is most keen: like that luckless maiden too, I had southern blood coursing in my veins, and the early maturity natural to the children of sunny climes was mine. In addition to this, my education had been based upon the "forcing" system, and in consequence my feelings and thoughts were already those of a woman.

Rose Bernard on the contrary, the fresh, rosy-cheeked Saxon maiden, brought up under the cramping system, living in country retirement, knowing nothing of people save the villagers around, and of society except the few families amongst whom her aunt visited, had retained to the age of twenty, much of the

\* Longfellow.

vernal freshness of early youth : in many things I felt myself to be really her senior—at times she seemed almost to look up to me, but when the exuberance of my spirits carried me beyond myself, which it did sometimes, she felt as if she had the advantage over me, and would play the woman, and give “Isola, my dear girl,” good advice in a simple, innocent style, which certainly amused, if it did not instruct me.

I pitied her very much, for I understood her to be entirely dependant upon her aunt, and I knew that a fit of caprice or temper in the latter, might at any moment turn the poor girl adrift : in calling the relationship between them that of aunt and niece, I commit an error, Rose was only Lady Bernard’s niece by marriage, and her claim upon her kindness and affection therefore was the less binding.

The old lady kept us waiting a long time in suspense, about the Compton invitation ; I could see that it agitated her niece not a little, but she managed to conceal her emotion from her aunt very well ; as for me, I could have beaten the old dame almost for not at once



giving her answer cheerfully in the affirmative, for there was something in her cold, stolid manner which caused me considerable irritation. She formed her opinions hastily, and adhered to them with a pertinacity, which she called "firmness," but which others considered pig-headed obstinacy.

The distinction between these two qualities is difficult to define, but it would appear to be the same mental property, only developed in different ways according to the mind of the individual.

A great mind—untrammelled by prejudice, —unswayed by conceit, weighs well a subject, and calls its logical powers into exercise, before making a decision, consequently it can always produce a reason for any judgment or opinion it may form. Not so, the crude, or weak, or ignorant mind ; the latter jumps to a conclusion, under the influence of any exciting cause, however trifling, and once on the debatable ground, imagines that whether in the right, or in the wrong, it is necessary to maintain one position.

People so constituted, though most amiable in other respects, will swear black is white,

under these circumstances : it is waste of time endeavouring to convince them—they will use arguments opposed to yours till they become converted to, or for the time fancy they hold the opinions, which from mere love of opposition they bring to battle against you. Theirs is the pig-philosophy, they will not go whither you wish to drive them, and even if convinced in their own minds of their error, they will take good care that you shall not have the gratification of imagining that your arguments have had any weight.

This was Lady Bernard's character exactly, and Rose, more I think from association with this pigwiferous spirit, than her own natural tendency, had a good deal more of it about her than was agreeable. Of course, with the elder lady, the deference due to her age prevented my ever bringing my opinions in violent contact with hers, but with Rose, I was withheld by no such scruples, and many were the "tussles," we had together, upon a variety of subjects ; and a little mule I found her.

Lady Bernard, at length, informed us with a very bad grace, that she supposed she must go, or we should not be contented, and a day was fixed for our departure.

Rose thereupon was seized with a mania for buying new dresses, and many were the visits to the milliner in the neighbouring town, which that young lady paid. Hour after hour was passed in deliberation upon the important matters of the toilet: ribbons, silks and laces passing in review in bewildering variety, quite engrossed Rose's thoughts, and left room for nothing else. She infected me a little with her excitement, and set my mind at work, building ærial castles, conjuring up bright visions fancy-dyed, and dreaming those brilliant dreams which haunt the downy pillow of youth—indulging in those bright anticipations, which, when realized, if they are ever, are but the faint reflection of the gorgeous scenes one has imagined.

For, in youth, we are like the child running on, ever on, towards the sun-lighted spot he sees in the distance before him: he perceives

not that though he advances, the shadows of evening likewise, and the gilded line of light is still far off—and ever farther—till the sun sets behind the hill, and all is cold, cold shadow.

## CHAPTER IV.

"The merry homes of England!  
Around their hearths by night,  
What gladsome looks of household love  
Meet in the ruddy light!  
There woman's voice flows forth in song,  
Or childhood's tale is told,  
Or lips move tunefully along  
Some glorious page of old."

HEMANS.

I OUGHT to say something about Serle Park, the residence of the widowed Lady Bernard, but as the reader is now going to Compton, and I feel as desirous of taking him there as I once was anxious to repair thither myself, Serle must be described in after pages.

Suffice it now, to say, that it had no particular beauties with which to delight the beholder: that it was merely a common-place

“fine property,” as regarded the domain, and of the house, I only knew that though sufficiently comfortable inside, the stiff lines, and long rows of staring windows, which formed the chief features in its exterior, never could be made into a picture.

So we will turn our backs on it for the present.

The morning fixed for our journey to Compton, was one of those “silvery” mornings peculiar to a fine autumn: the sky was of a pearly, tender grey, and a light, dreamy mist floated between it and you, softening the hues of meadow and greenwood, and imparting a shade of mystery to objects most familiar. In the air there was a freshness which made you feel that the ice-king had breathed on you for the first time in the season, and looking round, you perceived by the white veil spread over the grass, that his chilling breath had rested too on it, and on your favourite flowers, which drooped their heads as feeling that their doom was near.

Railroads had not intersected the county in which Serle was situated, so much when I first visited there, as they do now; and our

journey of forty miles, was to be made with our own horses.

It would seem an awfully tedious affair now-a-days ; but let the folks of the present generation say what they will, their parents enjoyed their rural excursions, driving through the unfrequented lane-scenery of Old England, far more than their adventurous progeny imagine.

The restless, feverish spirit, which pervades our undertakings, alike of pleasure and of business in these present years, had not awaked then. The word "slow" had not then received its cant signification, and people were ready to accept enjoyment in any modest shape in which it might offer itself.

Hence the way to Compton being chiefly by cross-roads, was not such a terrible affair after all in our opinion, as it afforded us many a lovely peep into turfy glades, and lordly parks, where the velvet coated deer stood and gazed as we passed : over barren moorlands, and heathery downs we drove ; up hill and down dale—now following the course of some river, swollen by the recent rains, now diverging from the common road to get a

glimpse of some old castle, or far-famed view ; through pretty villages, and dirty, dingy towns, and occasionally skirting a wood, rainbow-coloured, in the rich livery of autumn.

Some hours of this sort of thing was wearisome, however, it must be owned, and often I wished that the veritable Jehu of ancient days had been on the box, instead of the fat old coachman, who, being a " fixture " at Serle, always did as he pleased, and loving his cattle too well to urge them beyond their accustomed, dignified Park pace, permitted them to crawl along, and produce thereby an irritation of mind in me perfectly indescribable.

To a young, ardent spirit, one who would love to ride on the winged winds, and with a bounding thought o'erleap time and space infinite, purgatory can furnish few punishments more trying than slow travelling.

It was irritating too, to see that Lady Bernard was quite satisfied with the pace at which we travelled, and that Rose, snug in a corner of the carriage, looked as placid as possible, and when asked by me, what she was




thinking about, repeated some lines of Monckton Milnes's :—

“Poesy, which in chaste repose abides,  
As in its atmosphere, that placid flower  
Thou hast exposed to passion's fiery tides.”

The words set me dreaming, and thinking that the “fiery tides” must be preferable to “repose ;” till the heart has felt or suffered—has battled with the restless waves of life, and been cast, battered and bruised upon a shingly shore—it cannot appreciate the sweetness of repose ; it longs for action, and the turmoil of feelings, not the calm of the sheltered haven.

Rose, however, had a spirit which abode in “chaste repose.” So much the better for her.

We stopped to lunch, and bait the horses at a quaint old town mid-way to Compton, putting up at an antediluvian sort of inn—a low-roofed, straggling place, and never having been in a country hostelry in England before, the surprise I manifested at the peculiarities of the place, amused my companions ; and while Lady Bernard refreshed



herself with a nap, and Rose smoothed her pretty curls a dozen times at least, and arranged her tasteful toilette, I scampered the whole town over, taking sketches.

Our journey continued, brought us to Compton at length, but not before my patience had been most sorely tried.

The country was very flat, and the roads were nearly knee-deep in mud: it was with the greatest difficulty our straining horses dragged us through the mire and slush, and every fresh obstacle in our way quickened the beatings of my pulse.

At last, a turning in the road, brought us in sight of the house, a large square building in the Elizabethan style.

“It looks a dear old place, really!”

There it was, a comfortable “old English” house, expressing that homely qualification, rather than pretentious grandeur: roomy, yet full of snuggeries it looked—it seemed to invite you to accept its hospitable shelter; to ask no questions of who you were, or what you were coming for; it only appeared to say—“Come, and I’ll make you comfortable, no matter how you’ve been dealt with in other houses, here,

you will feel at home." If bricks and mortar had spirits in them, it is thus that the Compton ones would have spoken.

Dark beams, disposed in strange devices upon a pale ochre colour—quaint gable ends, and tall fanciful chimneys, were the features which struck you most in this old mansion; and these characteristic points gave it a picturesqueness charming to a painter. It was well backed too, by fine old manorial looking trees, with their toppling rooks' nests, from which "caw, caw," was the song perpetually heard, filling the air with voices as of welcome. "Caw, caw," greeted us as we drove through the fine avenue of limes which conducted to the Old Hall, and in the hoarse, unmusical sound, my young heart found a charm.

From the breezy tree-tops, and cleaving with dark wing the realms of air, the bird breathed forth the monotonous cry again and again: there was something sad in its tone, it seemed so ripe with grave reflection. You could fancy it the spirit-cry, as ardent and impetuous it left the parent nest; then, as to and fro above your head the sound went

hither and thither, it seemed like philosophical reflections made on nether objects; and at length, home returning, as weary of wandering, it imaged the experienced heart which cries, "back, back to my childhood's days—to hope, to innocence, and peace," and the rook finds his nest again, but the heart—ah—that is a questionable matter.

Over the house, roses though late in the season, with clematis and magnolias were clustered, softening the angles of the building, and giving it a home-look—a coziness which was enchanting.

On a lawn in front, at a little distance from the house, stood a magnificent beech tree, the long, golden branches of which, trailing on the ground, formed a perfect chamber beneath them. The smooth-shaven sward was dotted with beds of choice flowers, and was bounded by a moat, rich in summer-time in water-lilies, and other aquatic plants.

To the right lay a paddock, half encircled by a plantation, while to the left, stretched a succession of gardens, a perfect wilderness of covered alleys, labyrinthine walks, high dry

terraces, fountains, alcoves, shrubs, trees, and flowers in wild beauty.

As we drove up to the entrance, two other carriages drove off to the stables, announcing the fact that there was a "gathering," and standing in the porch was a gentleman whom Rose immediately recognised as the Reverend Anthony Marsden, the much tormented lover of the wilful Leila Compton.

And there, too, stood the said Leila, one of the loveliest visions I had ever beheld; but there was only time for one glance at her beauty, before we were in the bustle of alighting, and of being ushered into the large outer hall, where everybody seemed to be welcoming us in the most hospitable manner.

Introductions were soon taking place on all sides, and amongst others, several gentlemen were presented to me, who were apparently just come in from shooting, and remarkably fine specimen of young Englishmen they were; no wonder, Rose liked Compton so much.

"We were just thinking you would never arrive," cried Leila, "we thought you would be engulfed in the mud, and I was proposing to send a party of 'navvies' in search

of you, to fish you out, and bring your remains here whether already fossilized or not ; do come to mamma, she has been quite anxious about you :—‘mamma mia,’ here are our lost friends ;” and a dear, noble looking old lady came forward and welcomed us in a voice of winning sweetness.

The salutations were hardly over, when the dressing-bell rang a warning peal, and we were conducted to our respective rooms.

The hall which we had entered was spacious, occupying the centre of the house, and was hung with hunting trophies tastefully arranged.

A broad staircase, branching off on either side, conducted you to different parts of the mansion ; the balusters were of finely carved oak, and the boards were polished to a dangerous, slippery brightness, a taste of our ancestors shewn likewise in the floor of most of the apartments.

The one to which Rose and I were shewn, was a chamber of large size, panelled with the darkest oak—indeed the wood was almost black from some cause or other, and it gave a sombre, grim look to the apartment. In the

centre of the room was a huge bed, draped with crimson—a great family bed, in which you might flounder about for ever, without requiring it to be re-made, and dream of the Hall of Eblis, and all sorts of horrors if you felt so disposed :—its massive posts seemed made for hanging yourself upon, and the grinning faces at the corners looked like dismal devils come to tempt you to the crime.

The mantel-piece extended nearly up to the ceiling, and exhibited in bold relief the arms of the Comptons—the furniture corresponded with it, all massive, heavy, richly carved, and of antique pattern—"the haunted chamber," was the impression conveyed to the mind, on entering this dormitory. A glorious fire, however, was blazing in the ample grate, it danced and crackled, and now and then, threw lurid flashes into one of the dark corners, where a portrait of some great-great-grandame, in faded crayons, hung to prove that beauty was of old descent in the Compton family ; and the eyes seemed to glimmer in the half darkness with a strange, mysterious sort of expression, as if partly angered, partly curious at our intrusion.

The idea of sleeping in this room, with goblin eyes upon one, and Heaven knows how many secret doors in the wainscot, through which things in the flesh, or out of it, could come forth and astonish me, had something very fascinating about it, and dragging up the ponderous chairs to the fire, Rose and I sat resting, and warming ourselves, while we rejoiced that the chance of an adventure had fallen to our share. Gazing round the room, it was impossible to help thinking but that we should be initiated into some of the mysteries of the spirit-world before morning: Rose spoke of it quite seriously, and having been staying frequently at Compton, knew all the legends and tales of the place—talked of trap-doors, and subterranean passages, sliding panels, and inexplicable noises, hinted at ghosts, and distressed ladies who roamed about at very odd hours, and at last gave me some real facts concerning the house, that it was supposed to have been one of the places of concealment for “that dear Charles the Second,” and that it had been for some time in the possession of the Roundheads after-



wards, &c., which facts doubly increased my interest and delight.

"Come—there is the second bell, Rose, you're looking very nice—come."

"One moment, Isola, this curl won't hang properly, and doesn't my waist look very large to-night?"

"No—you'll break off like a biscuit if you attempt to make it any smaller."

I succeeded in reaching the drawing-room, after having three falls on the slippery boards, and deciding that in future I must skate along the passages; and in the interval, during which we await the summons to dinner, I may as well introduce the reader to some of the people assembled to enjoy the hospitality of Compton Hall.

Our hostess claims the first notice.

She sits in a large arm-chair by the fire, and round her the young folks cluster with a feeling of reverential love: as usual, she is dressed in deep, rich weeds, and no dress could suit her better—it seems to chasten the brilliancy of beauty which, in youth, must have been dazzling, and to the sombre garb she

gives a grace—an interest of her own. Lady Bernard sat by her, and it was a curious study to contrast these two, both of whom had known sorrow, and to see how differently it had affected them.

In one case it seemed to have increased the sternness of natural character, to have dulled the susceptibilities, and indurated the feelings, till a moving machine would have gone through the business and the pleasures of life, with as much interest as did Lady Bernard ; but in the courteous, high bred manner of Mrs. Compton, so eminently that of a gentlewoman, and the large dark liquid eye which smiled on you so kindly, there was something which besides winning you irresistibly by its persuasiveness, impressed you with the conviction that the softness and sweetness were in part the result of the refiner, Sorrow.

They had come out of the furnace of affliction, like metals possessing different properties. The ductile spirit of Mrs. Compton came out purified from her fiery trials, and with tender sympathy her heart turned to the sorrowing and the young : it was indeed

not surprising that the latter all loved her—she was ever foremost in promoting their amusement—and their enjoyment constituted hers.

Her idea was, that as we advance in years, and our own interests die out, we should live in our children, or if unblest by offspring of our own, we should at least share our sympathies with the children of others.

Leaning carelessly against the mantelpiece, in an easy Charles the Second sort of style, was her son, Reginald, a remarkably handsome man, and to all appearance quite aware of the fact.

He reminded one of a portrait by Vandyke, just the “subject” he liked to paint: the long oval face, high aquiline nose, and deep set expressive eye, were all there; and in his manner there was an *abandon* which recalled to you the “Merry Monarch,”—too *débonnaire* perhaps for some; but the kind of man most ladies like, and I noticed that those who spoke most in his disfavour, in their hearts liked him best.

He advanced to Rose as we entered, offering her a chair, and as he did so, there was a

twinkle of decidedly mischievous import in his eye, which made him look provokingly handsome. As to Rose, she blushed like her namesake of the garden on the occasion, and, if the truth must be told, made a goose of herself by doing so, but she couldn't help it, poor thing !

And where was Leila, the bright creature of whom I had caught a glimpse on my entrance? Sitting on a low seat, the centre of a bevy of girls, eclipsing them all by her transcendent beauty ; and it would be well perhaps to describe her here, before we make further acquaintance with one, whose lovely outward form was so true an index to the better part within : her fair spirit was worthily shrined.

Taller than the generality of her sex, an ineffable grace—"la grâce, qui vaut encore mieux que la beauté,"—guided every movement, and prevented any appearance of *gaucherie*—the common detraction from the charms of very tall women. She was like a sylph in easy elegance, and playful as a young fawn, and as to her face, it fairly bewitched you.

What there was in it to produce this effect, I hardly know ; for the features, though delicate and pretty, might have been found fault with by hypercritical observers ; but the expression in its constant variety was most captivating.

Now, radiant with bright thoughts, or innocent mirth, it flashed on you like a sunbeam, and seemed too brilliant for any save a stoic to gaze on unscathed—but anon, like a cloud athwart summer skies, a change would flit over the face, and the coral lips would close over the pearly teeth, and the fine hazel eyes, something like her mother's, would wear a look of tenderness or pity. Perhaps this look of hers was even more dangerous than the other ; but at all events, each and all her varied looks had done damage enough, so Rosa informed me, and it was easy to believe it to be the case.

Evelyn Compton, her sister, was also beautiful ; nature had been most indulgent to the family certainly, rarely do you see such a perfect development of form as was visible in each member of that circle, and Evelyn was in a totally different style to her volatile sister.

Many there were who said they admired her the most—for my part, I learned afterwards to love them both so much, as scarcely to be a fair judge of the beauties of either, but looking back to first impressions, I must say, I thought her the “finest woman,” but less sparkling and brilliant than Leila.

In the exquisite proportions of the undulating form, and the rich moulding of the limbs, she would have served as a model for Cytherea. The arm was a study in its rounded and delicate shape, and so was the small head with its clustering ringlets.

The bright sunny face, and merry laughter-loving eyes had something in them irresistibly charming; but remarkable above all was the softness which characterized her—something motherly and Eve-like, which made children cling to her, and the poor, the servants, or the sick always told the tale of their grievances to “Miss Evelyn,” regarding her in the light of a ministering spirit. She was a being whom for any world-wearied, broken-spirited, be-devilled man to win, would have been happiness indeed. Possessed of such a treasure, he would have exclaimed to a less for-

tunate friend in the language of Sir Philip Sydney.

"Believe me, man, there is no greater blisse  
Than is the quiet joy of loving wife ;  
Which whoso wants, half of himself doth misse ;  
Friend without change, playfellow without strife,  
Food without fulnesse,—counsaille without pride,  
Is this sweet doubling of our single life."

## CHAPTER V.

"Black, black's the colour for me—  
There's a joy in the tremulous light that lies  
Like a shaken star in mild blue eyes—  
There's a bliss in each that's beautiful too,  
And they change their grace when they change their hue  
From quiet to queenly, from brown to blue,  
In Mary or Haydee.  
But though my heart bends to each fierce attack  
It falls at a glance from imperial black,  
Subdued by the regal light that flashes  
Its edicts from the long-drawn lashes."

PATRICK SCOTT.

WHEN marshalled for dinner, I found myself committed to the charge of Mr. Charles Compton, a cousin to the others, a young fair man, while Reginald acted as escort to Lady Bernard, the Rev. Anthony Marsden secured Leila, and Evelyn fell to Captain Hawkes, a little cross-looking, wolfish sort of animal.



The disposal of the others, I had no time to notice; but I was placed vis-à-vis to Leila and Mr. Marsden, and the couple interested me very much. You saw at a glance the state of the case; his jealous watchfulness, his openly manifested devotion, and her joyous freedom from any restraint which the said worship and watchfulness might have caused, and the careless way in which she received his attentions, revealed at once the position in which they stood to each other.

His young reverence was of decidedly mediæval appearance, reminding you of portraits of saints, taken in the early "Pre-Raphaelite" style of art. His face was painfully thin, and of cadaverous pallor, and his dark eye was quick and searching. Intellectuality was expressed in his countenance, and a quiet, good-breeding in his manners, and his earnestness of feeling was only too evident; but as a mate for the bright beautiful bird at his side, he seemed as unfit as, reversing the simile, "a dove trooping among crows."

Absorbed in speculations upon this pair, I did not at first notice the absent manner of my neighbour, Mr. Charles Compton, who had

scarcely addressed a remark to me, since I had been confided to his care ; but presently I perceived that the cause of his abstraction lay, in the magnetic influence of a pair of very brilliant orbs at the further end of the table, so on mischief bent, I proceeded to address him.

“ As I am a stranger here Mr. Compton, will you kindly be a ‘ Court Guide ’ or ‘ Royal Red Book,’ and give a ‘ local habitation and a name ’ to some of the faces and dresses here present ? ”

“ Certainly, with pleasure ; is there any one in particular, respecting whom I can give you information ? ”

“ Yes. I wish to know who that young lady is with those glorious eyes, at the other end of the table.”

“ The one in pink ? Oh ! Miss Caroline Fortescue. Allow me to recommend you some of this ‘ salmi ’ that is coming round.”

“ There is something very peculiar in that girl’s eyes.”

“ Peculiar ? they’re very beautiful ; the man is asking you if you take sherry, Miss Brand.”

"You call them beautiful, Mr. Compton, now to me, attractive and brilliant as they undoubtedly are, they are most disagreeable; hence, I cannot apply the term beautiful to them."

"That is strange—quite paradoxical."

"Not at all, I think if you consider you will find that we never call anything beautiful, which is positively unpleasing to us individually, whilst we are very apt to dignify with the name of 'beauty' the form of any object which happens by some mysterious agency to make a pleasing impression on the mind."

"But there are rules for beauty."

"Yes: linear beauty, as developed in the exquisite works of the ancient Greeks, which will be models of human grace to all time; but rules do not apply to the eye, though many mistake a happy accident of colour, and due proportions, for a beauty which no shade of colour, and no accuracy of mere lines can give. There is not one point on which opinions are more divided than on that question of 'eyes.' Some consider 'size' everything, and that is perhaps the most common error of all; it must be the fine, large, unmistakeable organ, brim-

ful of feeling, or without it altogether as the case may be, but large and decided—it is “a beautiful eye” immediately. Others again prefer the small penetrating sharp eye which reads you whether you will or not, and the force of mental influence is so great, that involuntarily the term ‘beautiful’ is applied to the transfixing weapon. Then, a few there are, who consider colour everything, and black, blue, hazel, grey, and green, each have their advocates.”

“Well, as regards colour, I have no choice, for in my opinion the beauty of an eye depends upon the expression.”

“The expression! that is very vague, when the expression of an eye may vary every minute, with the sentiments or emotions awakened; but perhaps you mean the habitual expression?”

“Certainly.”

“In that case it is more than mere beauty of feature—linear grace has nothing to do with it, it becomes in a high degree, mental.”

“Of course, it is a gleam from the soul.”

“At that rate then, Mr. Compton, you admire the eyes of all clever and amiable

people, as the gleam must necessarily in their case be of a pleasing nature."

He was silent, and I continued.

• "It appears to me, that the peculiarity of mental or moral expression, which by sympathy with our own feelings pleases, is the thing which after all is meant when we speak of beautiful eyes, and those who gain most celebrity for this attraction, are those who have in large proportion the gift of influencing and sympathizing with others; it does not always require talent for this, it is in many cases inexplicable—the 'secret of influence' is still undiscovered, yet felt in the bosom of each living being as a real, though mysterious power."

Glancing across the table at this moment, my eyes encountered those of Leila Compton, and she offered a case in point: her eyes would have been found fault with by those who consider the beauty of an eye to consist in its large size, for hers, though Juno-shaped, were somewhat small; but to me, they were most beautiful; something in their unsullied depths spoke to my heart, I felt there was sympathy between us, one of the sweetest sources of pleasure; hence, I thought them beautiful,

but strictly, and artistically speaking, they would not have been pronounced faultless.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, "I can see you have something under discussion."

"The visual organ," cried Charles, "the fishy—the flashy—the fiery—the gooseberry—the goggle—and the lollapop, are having their several merits debated upon, and if you can suggest a few more eccentricities of that kind, take a part in the debate."

"Of course," said Leila addressing me, "Charles is placing himself in direct antagonism to you—whatever opinion you express, he is sure to take the opposite side, and exert all his logical powers to prove you in the wrong, but do not mind him—he is only arguing for practice."

We resumed our conversation, and it proved Leila to be correct in the opinion she had formed of her cousin. But for the restraint which good breeding happily imposes, our pleasant converse might have ended in a contest, and I thought Mr. Charles Compton a most pugnacious, disagreeable young man: he was neither handsome, nor

pleasing, and that he should be allotted to me, when there were so many preferable persons in the room, was a great nuisance.

Meanwhile, Mr. Marsden was lamenting in tender tones to Leila, that his stay at Compton must be very short.

"But you do not regret returning to that dear, mouldy old Oxford surely, Mr. Marsden?" said his companion, with a gush of enthusiasm. "Why the charm of association must be so delightful, that it has often been matter of regret to me that *ladies* could not be educated in colleges at Oxford. I hated learning at Madame Pompon's, but I am sure that if I had been sent to 'rooms' in some musty, mousy old place, taught out of a ponderous book, by some portly professor, or delightful 'Admirable Crichton' sort of creature, and dressed in a pretty becoming dress like you students, with straight, flat, scanty petticoats, I should have conceived a passionate fondness for study, and might perhaps have become an Olympia Morata, or Lady Jane Grey—who knows?"

Mr. Marsden took it all *en grand sérieux*—told her he thought she would have dis-

tinguished herself under such circumstances, and entered into a lengthy dissertation on colleges and college education in England and on the continent, to which Leila listened with all the innate politeness of her nature, but must have felt relieved when the ladies rising, we adjourned to the drawing-room.

Here I had a better opportunity of observing the female part of the company assembled at the Hall than I had yet had, and of acquiring a knowledge of their names, &c.

One little lady had afforded me considerable amusement during dinner, by her excessive volubility, and I now heard her addressed as Miss Rice. She was middle-aged, *petite* in figure, and with traces of having once been pretty, but the traces alone remained; she however appeared to be in happy unconsciousness of the decay of her charms, and coquetted away, with the airs of a young girl: she was evidently very weak-minded and silly, and having, as I understood, a handsome fortune, she seemed an easy prey for any of those despicable characters, known as "fortune-hunters."



However, a juvenile, romantic spirit clung to her in mature years, and made her direct the artillery of her charms at the best looking and most eligible men.

The consequence was, that poor Miss Rice was a source of amusement wherever she went, and in the present instance, Mr. St. Leger, the eldest son of an old S—shire baronet, being the object of attack, there was promise of a comedy being enacted.

“My dear Mrs. Compton,” she began, “what a very delightful person your friend Mr. St. Leger is; he has *l’air noble* in such a high degree—his manners are so fascinating, and he talks so nicely! I really must thank you for coupling us as you did—it was so very considerate and kind of you! He didn’t *ask* to be permitted to take me in to dinner—did he? Why I wish to know is, because he talked in such a dreadfully flattering way during dinner—really, so much so, that I felt quite confused—he—he!”

“Mr. St. Leger is a great favourite here,” said Mrs. Compton placidly.

“I am sure he must be—he’s a delightful creature, indeed—I don’t know when I’ve met

with such a distinguished person—in every way—but, by the bye, what a shame it was of some of you, dears, to tell him about me and my ponies.”

“Nay, Miss Rice,” exclaimed Leila, “don’t accuse us, pray—doesn’t the whole county know that your ponies are the prettiest in the world, and does not your fame as a whip, extend far and wide?”

“Well, I think you’re right, dear, but the poor fellow wants so much to see them, and I’ve no way of gratifying him, unless he comes to visit me at Hurst Grange—and I couldn’t very well ask him to do that—could I? it wouldn’t be correct—eh? but I should like to manage it somehow if I could: I know he would be so pleased.”

Leila deliberated; answering at length. “Not quite correct, Miss Rice, to have only one staying with you at a time, but if you invite half-a-dozen gentlemen, there is no harm in it: you know the old saying about ‘safety in numbers.’”

“Thank you, my dear, that’s a capital suggestion: I’ll adopt it—I dare say your brother Reginald would come too, and several

others I know ; and this will be my plan, I'll have the men all over, and get their visit done with, and then I can have some of you ladies to see me—can't I?"

Leila thought this plan a feasible one, though why the sexes should be divided in that strange fashion she could not divine, and hinted as much to the eccentric lady.

"Naughty puss!" cried Miss Rice playfully, "you forget my unprotected position—I am obliged to study propriety, and I wouldn't incur the responsibility of having promiscuous assemblages at my house on any account whatever. No, we live in a world of scandal, we can't be too careful, and yet with all my pains, I cannot help getting talked about—it's quite dreadful, every little act of mine, done in the purest innocence, is so mistaken!"

At this moment, a loud ring at the house bell made us all start, and many odd conjectures were formed as to "who it could be" at that strange hour.

Presently, the manly voice of Reginald was heard, welcoming a new-comer in hearty tones.

“How do you do, Grey? very glad indeed to see you, my dear fellow, to what happy chance are we indebted for this pleasure, which coming ‘unlooked-for’ is thrice welcome.”

The reply was made in a voice so musical and so peculiar, that it sent a thrill through me; but the next moment, the visitor was led off to the other gentlemen in the dining-room, and we heard no more.

The curiosity of the ladies was wound up to a high pitch to know who this unexpected visitor could be, and the simple reply of the servant, “Mr. Grey, ma’am,” did not satisfy the Eve-like weakness of the fair creatures; it was only when the gentlemen joined us that we were content.

Reginald then, coming forward to his mother, introduced the stranger.

“My friend, Mr. Grey, mother.”

“I am quite ashamed,” said that gentleman apologetically, “of intruding upon you, Madam, in this unceremonious manner, but I was passing within a few miles of Compton, and wishing very particularly to see Mr. St. Leger

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on electioneering business, I thought a ride over here would be easily accomplished. Such roads, however, as the tracks in these parts are called, mere shifting masses of mud, I had not anticipated; for hours I've been floundering about in these extraordinary specimens of roads, with truly Quixotic fortune attending me, and but for my profound ignorance of the locality, and the danger I was in of being benighted, I should not have thought of intruding upon you, at this unseasonable hour, and in this travel-stained attire."

The new comer was assured, that nothing could have happened more calculated to afford Mrs. Compton pleasure, than this opportunity of seeing a person of whom she had heard so much, and so favourably, as she had of Mr. Grey.

"At first," she said, "when your name was announced, I did not recollect it, but it is too widely known, not to be immediately recognised, when the Mr. Grey is specified."

"Travel-stained," as he was, he was soon seated by Mrs. Compton, charming, not only

her, but the whole party of ladies, by his conversation, which seemed to possess some marvellous power of fascination.

For my part, I felt in a dream, with the novelty of the whole scene, never having seen anything of English society.

Few could imagine the emotions I experienced on finding myself, for the first time in a country home, in the land of my fathers.

In thought, I seemed to go backwards, up the dark river of Time: I tried to imagine my father's boyhood days, when he, perhaps, enjoyed the hospitality of a similar rural abode, and looking round upon the old fashion of the house, and the antique style of the furniture, back yet further I was carried, and thoughts of "ancestry" newly and strangely crossed my mind: I seemed to fancy that generation after generation dwelling in one house—living, as it were, surrounded by spirits of the departed, which, if popular belief can be credited, love to return to haunt the spots dear to them in life, must ever live in the consciousness that those spirits are amongst them; and I thought how natural an incentive that reflection would create, for

living worthily—for not sullyng that time-honoured home either by mean actions committed there, or evil thoughts breathed in the sacred atmosphere.

It filled me with new emotions, this happy family scene ; and the voice of the stranger harmonized in so singular a manner with the tone of my thoughts—murmuring in musical, soft low cadences, like a summer stream, that in loitering I seemed to awake to a new world of thought, feeling and sensation.

Presently, music added its charm to the scene ; and for amateur performance it was very good indeed, albeit Lady Bernard, who had no great fondness for opera music, declared that a duet from “*Fra Diavolo*,” performed by Evelyn and the eldest Miss Fortescue, “nearly deafened” her, and that “the modern songs did not contain half the music—the real music that the songs did, which she used to sing in her girlhood.”

I fancied the defect lay in her powers of appreciation ; the heart’s chords could not reply so readily now to the touch of melody—no fresh feelings came welling up, as the sweet strains fell on her ear ; it was only

when some old—old tune stirred the depths of memory, ruffling the still, dark waters in which the Past lay buried, that Music's spell was felt.

Caroline Fortescue was next called upon to sing—the young lady with the eyes—and as she stood at the instrument, her sister playing the accompaniment, I was able to observe her particularly.

Her figure was not good: she was short, and had a waddling gait, and her face possessed no features which were striking, save the eyes, and in these there was something difficult to describe. As I have said, I did not admire them, but it was easy to believe that many of the sterner sex, on whom they were chiefly directed, would not be safe under their influence; their expression was too flattering to the self-love of the transfixed object, not to be received kindly, and appreciated warmly.

"It is all those eyes," said a young man once, when speaking of her conquests; and Reginald Compton—no mean authority, when a fair lady was on the *tapis*, and beauty was the theme of conversation—though he



laughed at the idea of her being considered a belle, even by the most infatuated, yet owned that "the girl was redeemed by her bewitching eyes."

Her voice was of great compass, sweet in tone, and managed with the art of a thorough musician, and I listened to her singing for awhile perfectly charmed, my whole attention absorbed, till I perceived the figure of Mr. Charles Compton standing in the doorway, and his attitude of spell-bound attention, excited my interest so strongly, that I could not help noticing him more particularly than I had yet done.

## CHAPTER V.

"Of stature fair, and slender frame  
 But firmly knit, was Malcolm Græme.  
 The belted plaid, and tartan hose  
 Did ne'er more graceful limbs disclose ;  
 His flaxen hair, of sunny hue  
 Curled closely round his bonnet blue ;

\*       \*       \*       \*  
 \*       \*       \*       \*

His form accorded with a mind  
 Lively and ardent—frank and kind."

LADY OF THE LAKE.

SCOTT'S description of Malcolm Græme occurred to me, as I looked at Charles Compton : he was about the middle height—five feet eight—the height for strength and activity, well made, with broad shoulders, finely-turned limbs, and delicate hands and feet.

In strength, he was a young lion ; in agility a deer ; and in all manly sports, none excelled Charles Compton.

The face would have disappointed some—it had even struck me, at first sight, as plain, for the forehead, though square and prominent, was low, and the mouth was not good ; but the first defect was concealed by the way in which he was *coiffé*—and nature had assisted him with a luxuriant supply of hair of a sunny brown ; and the fault about the mouth you forgot, in its varied expression, and its fine set of teeth. His eyes—I always had a weakness for eyes, and the reader will pardon their frequent mention—were full, intellectual-looking, and blue—real blue—a rare colour.

There was something about him, which, for a long time, I could not make out—a brusquerie of manner, which, without being positively ungentlemanlike, was very disagreeable, and, as I fancied, a bad-tempered look ; but yet, he seemed such a general favourite at Compton, that I was puzzled. Talent of a higher order he undoubtedly possessed, but as he generally showed it while taking the

opposite opinion to mine, and maintaining the truth of his assertions by the most specious arguments, I did not, then, like Charles Compton.

But I am forgetting that this was my first review of his *personnel* it was only the outward man I saw, as he stood there absorbed in Caroline Fortescue's song.

At its conclusion, dancing was proposed, and warmly seconded.

Rose and I were both too much fatigued to join in the galops and polkas, but at length I agreed to stand up in a quadrille with Mr. St. Leger, and (in conventional parlance) a "very nice person" I found him; but I was too tired to notice, or to think much, and glad enough when, the "benighted traveller" having retired to rest, and Lady Bernard having also sought her pillow, Rose proposed that we should follow the good example; so, to bed we went.

"Well, Isola, dear, and what do you think of Mr. St. Leger?" was one of the first questions of my companion.

"Oh! I'm quite of Miss Rice's opinion respecting him—think him 'a delightful

creature ;' but that Mr. Charles Compton seems a very disagreeable, contentious, ill-conditioned young man."

"Charles! Oh! anything but that; and they're all so fond of him, and make quite a fuss with him when he's visiting here."

"Mr. Reginald is handsome, is he not? there's something very wild and interesting about him, and he has the Stuart face. What a desperate lover he would make!"

Rose began brushing her hair with vehemence, and crumpling curl-papers *con spirito*.

I think, however, she must have fallen into a reverie before the glass afterwards, for I had been in bed a long, long time, when I heard the curling process still continuing.

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In spite of the grim chambers, and my anticipated ghost-adventures, the sun was high in the heavens ere we awoke the next morning, and on looking at my watch, I found it was very late.

"No matter," said Rose, "they're dread-

fully idle here, and we needn't get up at all if we don't like. It is Liberty Hall, and each one amuses himself *selon lui*."

"But Lady Bernard, with her eight o'clock breakfasts—how does she manage when here?"

"Oh! she makes herself quite at home, breakfasts alone, and then wanders about, making all sorts of discoveries about the gardeners and their delinquencies; and I fancy some of the gentlemen are always up, with whom she makes the tour of the premises."

"They certainly are up now," I exclaimed, as the tramp of horses was heard under the windows, and the voices of the gentlemen evidently mounting.

"Oh! they're off to the Meet," said Rose. "We shall have it all to ourselves to-day."

However, on finding our way down, which we did at last, we discovered that we had not been left in utter destitution as regarded beaux. Mr. Marsden and Charles Compton remained at home, "to comfort us," as they impertinently expressed them-

selves; but we were none of us slow in assigning other reasons in each case.

Disappointment was their portion, and blank were the looks displayed, when, Leila and Caroline Fortescue not appearing, it was discovered that both had accompanied the gentlemen to "the Meet" on horseback, with the intention, after seeing the hounds throw off, of proceeding to U—, the nearest town, with old Stafford, Reginald's trusty groom.

Charles Compton, when thus enlightened, looked cross and annoyed excessively, and poor Mr. Marsden, I really felt compassion for; his face became further elongated, and he looked like a squeezed lemon, from the effects of vexation. Both gentlemen, after breakfast, proceeded to the library, and while the latter took down an immense tome of ecclesiastical history, Mr. Compton began writing letters.

An extract from one of these (shown to me years afterwards) I will here transcribe, as it will supply some information which the inquisitive reader may feel, and spare me the awkward task of painting my own portrait.

The letter was to a very intimate College friend, and the passage alluded to, run thus.

\* \* \* \*

"I have been here a fortnight, you know the place well from my frequent description, and its being a favourite haunt of mine. I assure you that on the present occasion, it only requires you here, *mon camarade* of ancient times, to make the place next door to 'Il Paradiso' itself. The men are bearable, and the girls perfect houris.

"The Miss Brand concerning whom you ask me some questions, arrived yesterday, and it strikes me that she is identical with the young lady your friend is anxious about.

"As you ask me to describe her, I'll attempt to do so for friendship's sake, though there's nothing I hate so much as describing a 'she;' for if you admire a woman, it's ten chances to one, if you succeed in impressing another person with an adequate notion of your fair one's charms, and if you do not admire her, others may, and your unflattering description gives offence. However, I've seized the brush so now imagine: outline—long and sinuous—viz. tall and not ungraceful. Colour—



faith! I must mix up some tolerably dark ones, for had I not heard that she has some Spanish blood in her veins, I should have pronounced her to have had a 'touch of the tar-brush.'

"After the information I have had, however, respecting the said Spanish blood, I must paint her olive colour, rich, clear olive, with features that would have suited Semiramide, but are too grand for ordinary life—at least, for my notions of it.

"They say, she is only fifteen—*peut-être!* these children of the South mature early, but you would guess her eighteen or twenty, and her manner is as *prononcé* as that of a woman of any age, not forward at all, but you know what I mean, it has an *aplomb*—a something, there you must imagine it.

"It seems she is an orphan, lost both her parents early, and has been brought up by her guardian, who has left her pretty much to her own devices. Her father was General Sir Marmaduke Brand, her mother a Spanish, or rather, Mexican girl he fell in love with and married while quartered in the West Indies.

"Her guardian—know nothing about, only that he's a lord something, so this is all the information I can give you at present.

"Sufficient, however, I should imagine, to establish the point of identity.

"The Fortescues are here, you can guess the rest, and will call me a fool, I dare say."

\* \* \* \*

While Charles Compton was engaged penning the above, the ladies were amusing themselves in the drawing-room, with various feminine occupations, amongst which talking scandal, and gossiping about their neighbours' business were about the most interesting. I embedded myself comfortably in a pile of sofa cushions, and read "Lalla Rookh;" but every now and then, I found my thoughts wandering from the page before me, and reverting to the Mr. Grey, who had arrived so unexpectedly the evening before, who had been strangely mixed up with my dreams and visions of the night, and whom I had hoped to see again in the morning.

He had left Compton early before breakfast. I felt disappointed, though I scarcely knew why, for I had not spoken to this man—had

not been introduced to him even ; but likings are as inexplicable as antipathies.

During the morning the conversation turned upon him several times, and once I heard Lady Bernard asking Mrs. Compton who he was. She replied that Reginald had met him at the St. Legers, "and they became great friends," she continued, "and Reginald thinks him a very talented man—one who is likely to distinguish himself greatly one of these days."

"He seems to have plenty of assurance," said Lady Bernard, "and these pushing men always get on."

"Pushing men," that term grated most unpleasantly on my ear, and I removed from the vicinity of the old ladies, and seated myself near the young ones.

They too, were discussing the merits of Mr. Grey just then.

"He is so dreadfully, painfully grave," said one.

"He doesn't dance," remarked another.

"He's very good-looking though," observed a third. "Interesting looking—don't you think so?"

"Yes!" cried Evelyn, "those large melancholy eyes of his have a depth, a dreaminess about them which charms me; he has the eyes and brow of a poet, but the decision about the mouth, and the cool, calm manner he has, belong to a practical man."

"Is he married?" asked the elder Fortescue, who had remained at home.

Evelyn assumed a quizzical look which puzzled the questioner.

"Was he very attentive to you last night, Bessie?"

The young lady pouted, as she replied.

"Well, the man was civil, and I always like to have the *carte du pays* in such cases."

"You must prepare to live upon love if you marry him," said Evelyn, "for he is very poor I believe, and your dainty fingers will have to make pastry, and stitch wristbands, instead of holding a bridle rein, and painting flowers."

Miss Fortescue sneered most contemptuously, and muttered something about "the man."

I thought her one of the most disagreeable girls I had ever met with.

After luncheon, drives and walks were proposed, and I found myself enlisted amongst the pedestrians.

We had not proceeded very far, however, when some red coats were discernible in the distance, and presently we discovered that our friends were all returning, having had "a short run;" as they drew up, I could not help noticing Mr. St. Leger, who brought his horse up beside me.

He looked very well when mounted, and of course he knew it.

Tall, and of a figure rather to be called elegant than imposing, handsome in face, and with a grace of manner which was calculated to fascinate others, besides poor Miss Rice, he might have been considered worthy of admiration for personal appearance and advantages alone, but when backed by the expectation of £20,000 a year, going with the baronetcy, it was no wonder that he stood in such dread of managing mammas as he did.

He was no novice in the world's ways; he

had not lived thirty years in it without gleaning some golden grains from amongst the stubble, and after a youth of unsatisfactory folly, natural good sense came to his aid, and perhaps a feeling of satiety—that “sad satiety” which every worldling must feel, in whom the germs of good sense or feeling ever existed.

To improve the family estates, and the condition of the tenantry upon them, a thing never dreamt of by his father, seemed now a duty ; and political distinction, a laudable ambition. He was already favourably known in Parliament, and the path to honour was before him.

Of marriage he had not yet entertained any idea, considering that there was “time enough” for settling down into the Benedict :—and another reason had its weight.

Early extravagancies had embarrassed him to a considerable extent, and he was too high-minded to make an innocent girl the make-weight in the balance against his debts.

Managing mammas, however, knew nothing either of his outward circumstances or inward

feelings ; they only saw his nominal advantages, and in spite of a naturally good temper, and an artificial imperturbability, it was with difficulty he could help sometimes betraying his annoyance at the schemes, so palpably laid to entrap him.

At Compton, he enjoyed comparative immunity from this man-stalking, hence he was a frequent guest at the Old Hall.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Some nymphs there are, too conscious of their face,  
For life predestined to the gnome's embrace.  
These swell their prospects, and exalt their pride,  
When offers are disdained, and love denied :  
Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,  
While peers, and dukes, and all their sweeping train,  
And garters, stars, and coronets appear,  
And in soft sounds Your Grace salutes their ear.  
'Tis these that early taint the female soul  
Instruct the eyes of young coquettes to roll,  
Teach infant cheeks a hidden blush to know,  
And little hearts to flutter at a beau."

RAPE OF THE LOCK.

As we stood talking, Leila and Miss Caroline Fortescue suddenly turned the corner of the road on horseback, and our attention was immediately turned to the young ladies.



Leila, in her riding-dress, looked enchanting.

Certainly, of all styles of beauty, hers was the most calculated to fascinate; and now, as she reined in the spirited and beautiful animal she sat so well, her cheek glowing with healthy excitement, and her eyes undimmed by one shade of care, a brighter being was never seen on earth.

Glancing from her to Mr. St. Leger, I thought, "what a fine couple they would make!" While poor Mr. Marsden, if not unworthy to possess such a treasure (he was an excellent young man, no doubt, but excellency of one kind does not attract, by necessity, excellency of another) never, I felt sure, could enjoy its possession, if his plans for obtaining it should be successful.

His jealousy would keep him ever on the rack, and talented and sensible as he might be, it was too obvious that he did not know how to manage the sweet, loveable, yet spoilt girl he sought to win.

She bantered both Mr. Marsden and Charles on their being the only two gentlemen unwilling that day to follow the hounds,

and as she said so, glanced rather maliciously at Charles.

He was still looking gloomy ; but Caroline Fortescue contrived quietly to bring her horse close to where he was standing, and with a gentle, "unconscious" look, made some remark which had the effect of rousing him completely.

"You've been fatiguing yourself too much," he said, anxiously ; and as he looked up into her face, the soft languor which pervaded its expression increased his concern.

"We had better return immediately," he exclaimed. "I really wonder, Leila," he continued, addressing his cousin, "that you are so inconsiderate. You seem to forget that all girls cannot encounter fatigue as you can. You've half-killed Miss Fortescue."

"What is the matter?" cried Leila, in a tone of alarm. "Caroline—why, you assured me, dear, that you were not in the least fatigued! I am so grieved! What shall we do?"

"Do? return home at once," exclaimed Charles impatiently, and taking the bridle from her hand, he led Miss Fortescue's horse.

Tears trembled in Leila's eyes, but I alone perceived them.

Upon our return to the house, Miss Caroline Fortescue's indisposition created a great sensation, every one asking her how she felt, and making offers of the remedies in vogue for fainting ladies. She smiled as she received these attentions, and hers was a peculiar smile—the lips slightly parted, just showing two front teeth which projected a little, though not in a disfiguring degree.

Charles was highly excited, though he cloaked his feelings under a semblance of *empressement* to amuse his aunt's guests ; and when Miss Fortescue had retired to her apartment, there by the advice of all parties to remain till dinner-time, he led the way to the billiard-room, where he puffed away at his cigar—sent the balls flying recklessly—made all sorts of heterodox movements, and finally cut the cloth.

At dinner, Caroline Fortescue re-appeared, but still wearing the quiet subdued look she had assumed in the morning.

Charles was at her side, and later in the evening, when called upon to sing, and she

declined, pleading her inability to do so, he must have been by her then, for I remember she turned to him and said :

“ I cannot sing—spare me this trial—volunteer in my place—and how thankful I shall be !”

He did sing for her, and to her, and the words were these :

“ I'm no dreamer—no, not I—  
Roaming through the vapoury sky,—  
Floating in the moonrays cold—  
Musing on the things of old :  
Flattered by a hollow seeming,  
Dreaming ever—ever dreaming,  
In a pale, ethereal beaming.

“ I, care not for shapes ideal :  
Life to me is warm and real.  
Give me sunshine—give me song—  
Let the streamlet rush along  
With a full and vigorous flowing ;  
Flowers upon its margin growing—  
Sunbeams on its bosom glowing.

“ Such my wish—but lack-a-day !  
Life it is not always May.  
Oft my sky is clouded o'er—  
Oft my course is baffled sore :  
And the waters meet and sever,  
Struggling hard in their endeavour  
To rush onward—onward ever.

“Maiden! in thine eye appears  
Light to chase a cloud of fears :  
Toil will vanish 'neath thy smile,—  
Life thou canst of care beguile.  
Every tempest I could weather—  
Grief would pass o'er us together,  
Lightly—lightly as a feather.

“Come then—come my guiding light !  
Gleam upon my loving sight :  
Heed not how the waters wrestle—  
Come and to my bosom nestle :  
And though storms o'er us may hover,  
Thou wilt find me no wild rover,  
But thine own, fond, faithful lover !”

With earnest feeling he sang, and his voice deep and clear, was well calculated to touch the heart : his face too was worth noticing while singing, for though as I have said, plain, yet it mirrored every feeling—every thought of a warm, passionate heart, as yet fervent and fresh, and tasting for the first time the sweet enthrallment of ‘Love’s Young Dream.’

Caroline Fortescue had prudently ensconced herself in the bay window ; and there, half concealed by the muslin draperies, and the blooming flowers in a *jardinière*, sat listening with downcast eyes, but a triumphant smile.

Miss Rice thought it but proper to appear touched; she applied her handkerchief to her eyes, and with a gush of girlish enthusiasm, enquired the name of the song.

Mr. St. Leger was standing by.

"You feel the words, Miss Rice?" he said interrogatively.

"Feel them? yes, deeply—I have a heart, Mr. St. Leger."

"Great misfortune, my dear Madam, you may believe me; people ought not to have hearts in the present state of society.

"But I'm not formed for mixing with the unfeeling rabble which composes the fashionable world—I'm convinced I ought to have lived in the days of Helen of Troy, when whole nations would engage in a noble war for the sake of one lovely woman."

"The Trojan war, that's all a myth—you do not believe all the incidents on record respecting it, surely?"

"Indeed I do, and don't pray rob me of my romantic faith: then the days of the Troubadours must have been delightful to live in, not but what men write verses to one now-a-days; but then, they went all over the

country singing one's praises, owning their devotion, noble fellows! O, I should have liked to be a maiden, dwelling in a mountain castle!"

"Better to be what you are, my dear Miss Rice—a maiden dwelling in a lowland Grange; you're much more accessible, and within an easy distance of a good market town, which let me tell you is no small advantage."

"That is no compensation to me for the lack of romance in my residence; the only approximation to anything like poetry which I find, is in the meeting of the hounds—something then in the cries and shouts, and the dresses of the sportsmen reminds me of uniforms, and 'War's shrill clarion.'"

"I see you're gifted with a fertile imagination."

"Is that all?" and she smiled on him bewitchingly, then added in a tender tone, "have not I a heart? as fond—as deep—as pure—as faithful, as—"

Mr. St. Leger softly took the hand which he found pressing his arm, and placed it nearer to its owner's, and saying,

"Excuse me, Miss Brand is going to honour me for this waltz," he was soon whirling me round to an inspiring strain.

"What a strange being Miss Rice is!" remarked my companion in one of the pauses of our rotatory movements.

"Yes, but good-natured."

"Is good-nature a quality you prize very highly?"

"It covers a multitude of imperfections; it would prevent us, for example, from criticizing our little friend with the gushing sensibilities."

"No — no — that's quite allowable; in society we're all fair game, you know, and though you shrink from making critical observations, you would find few so scrupulous. Now what is a 'good-natured person' in the common acceptance of the term—a simply good-natured person? An individual who can go through life contented with himself and others—the latter feeling being generally the result of the former. Of course such people are never critical, and the world styles them 'good-natured.' Far be it from me to speak of them in a disparaging manner,



but for the good of society it is well, that every one is not so happily constituted."

"How so?"

"Because an observant and critical eye is a most desirable thing to possess. Mind you, I do not approve of a spiteful, or ill-natured spirit, but ridicule is the only glass in which we can see our foibles, and he who cures another of a fault or an absurd habit, may himself be cured of, perhaps, the same identical fault, by similar means."

"Well, no moralizing now—look at that couple, Mr. Compton and Miss Fortescue—how well Mr. Compton dances!"

"Is that paying a compliment to a man?"

"In this case, yes: his style of dancing is manly and graceful—there is nothing of the posture-master about it, it seems a spontaneous expression of his mood of mind; but in a few years he should give it up—I do not like to see any but quite young men dancing."

"Indeed! are your sympathies then so strong in favour of crudities?"

"No, but I like all things to be in harmony; a light heart and a light step go

together ; but after a certain age, it would be too much to expect either the one or the other ; it would be like a mockery of the chastisements and sorrows which are met with in life, which generally, though not always rob us of our elasticity of spirit ; and the calmness and dignified composure which they should bring, you must admit, are not the springs which move the limbs in performing the gyrations of a waltz."

Charles Compton was, indeed, dancing with a light step, and a lighter heart, and he determined, that very evening, should decide his fate.

He felt that the being he held in his arms, had wound herself strangely round his heart. In every thought of the Present, in every dream of the Future, her image rose before him : to have her by his side, would make any state blissful ; poverty, privation, it is scarcely likely that their grim shadows stole over his sunlighted dream ; but if they did, one bright vision chased them away, and it seemed that he could endure anything, could manfully brave the darkest day with her to cheer him :—and had he not a stout heart, and

a strong arm? had he not the "strong will, and the endeavour," which would insure success in every venture?

All this came in a rush of thought and feeling before him, and free from the slightest taint of selfishness, or mean calculation, he determined to risk everything on the cast of the die.

"Does she love me?" was the one thought which agitated him.

He could only answer it in the affirmative, when looking back on their intercourse, and the open preference she had manifested for him, and it seemed unjust to her, as well as to himself to delay an explanation any longer.

He contrived, therefore, to lead her from the antique hall in which they had been dancing; and presently found himself seated by her side, upon a sofa in the library.

"Miss Fortescue," he began, "I have brought you hither, that you may decide my fate; it is impossible for you to be unaware of the state of my feelings towards you. I must, in so many ways, have betrayed my sentiments, that it will not surprise you to hear

that it is in your power to make me either supremely happy—or—or very miserable.”

Miss Fortescue, whether really surprised or not, affected to be so; but before she could give utterance to any expression, either of repulse or of encouragement, her young lover proceeded.

“Listen to me—I love you—love you with every thought and feeling of my heart—and mine is no light love—no every day effusion. To you, my first—my only love, I dedicate my heart—my life; will you accept the offering?”

She had turned away her head; but he was on his knees before her.

“Caroline,” he cried, eagerly, fondly, “will you not vouchsafe me one word?”

She looked gravely upon him.

“You have taken me quite by surprise,” she said quietly.

“Surprise? Caroline!—when every word, every look, must have told you long, long ago the same thing?”

Unheeding him, she continued,

“I could not have imagined this—it is

very, very distressing: indeed you pain me exceedingly."

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed faintly—adding in a voice, hoarse from conflicting feelings. "Pain you? I cannot understand—you do not love me then?"

She was silent.

"Caroline!" and this time his voice did not rise above a whisper. "I implore you to speak to me: have I been misled? Do you not care for me? What is it?"

Miss Fortescue looked confused.

"I fear," she at length replied, "you have been labouring under a slight mistake;" a cloud was gathering darkly on his brow, "for though I have the greatest possible esteem for you—as—as—a friend, yet," she paused, as if expecting him to assist her, but he did not speak, though his breast heaved, and the breath came short, and heavily—"yet our hearts are such unmanageable things!" and she laughed affectedly, "and mine I think is a particularly stubborn little thing—no, no, Mr. Compton, you really must forget me."

Charles Compton rose.

"Permit me, Miss Fortescue, to re-conduct you to the drawing-room."

His voice still trembled—his face was deadly pale, and large round beads stood thickly on his forehead, but he dashed them away, and as the false girl relinquished his arm at the drawing-room door, his voice was steady, and his manner, calm and cold, as Charles Compton's had never been before, when with a profound bow, he said,

"I will take your advice—I will forget you, Miss Fortescue."

A few minutes had effected the work of years; he had entered the library with a wild, burning passion at his heart—panting to reveal it, and to obtain thereby the sympathy, which from that one being, would have made his heaven; but in the moment that the flames burst forth, they had been coldly and cruelly damped: his very thoughts seemed chilled, and he had checked all further demonstration with an effort which cost him agony.

Oh! that heart-sickness! the worse for bringing with it distrust of all things, a

faithless, mocking spirit which jests henceforth at truth and innocence, incredulous of aught pure or holy in this imperfect life.

\* \* \* \*

As the two sisters were retiring for the night, Caroline laughingly confided to her sister, an account of the *scena* with her lover.

"To imagine for a moment," she added in conclusion, "that I should throw myself away upon *him* ! without position or fortune, how he could have the presumption to address me, I cannot think ! C'est un sot vraitment !"

"But, Caroline, he's very well off."

"Well off—yes ! for a single man, but for a husband !" she shrugged her shoulders, "why, he could hardly pay my glove and shoe bills : you forget, my dear, that you and I are portionless maidens, who were interesting personages enough in the days of chivalry, but now-a-days—hélas !"

"Then knowing this, why on earth did you give him such encouragement?"

"Mais quoi donc ? it was irresistible—I couldn't help it ; you would have done the

same, *sorella mia*, and I must own I did not expect such desperation; however, *n'importe*—a lesson in life will do him good.”

Whether or not—it *did* “do him good,” is a question.

He passed the night, pacing his room, reflecting bitterly upon his crushed feelings—the nipping of the first budding hope of his young heart—the mockery of that girl’s bright eyes! He could almost have hated her, and in his hate of her, included all women, so apt are we to include a class, in our estimation of an individual.

But ever and anon, would return to him in brighter colours, her many fascinations—almost blinding him to every sense save of misery.

He had so worshipped her! and she had *led him on*—yes—the more he thought of it, the more this belief gained ground, till he felt inclined to believe that in spite of all, she *did* love him. What, if she had acted thus from being privately engaged to another? or from the consciousness of her poverty?—(he recollected the Fortescues were not reputed girls of fortune), or did she doubt his sincerity!—



no—no ! it would not do—she might have told him each and all of these things.

No ! that mocking laugh, so silvery and sweet as he had ever thought her laugh to be, that laugh came to his mind, and it sent the proud blood rushing to his brow. He had been cruelly duped by a cold, heartless coquette—the truth was plain enough, and as he pondered upon it, the idol he had set up in his heart, lost its sanctity ; with one groan he dashed the polluted image from its shrine—and rose a stronger man.

Eager, enthusiastic, impetuous, as Charles Compton's nature was, to him was given a wonderful power of self-mastery. In proportion to the strength of his feelings, to their depth, and intensity, was the nature of the struggle to subdue them, and once subdued—it was for ever.

Had all this been known publicly at the Hall, no surprise would have been expressed, when, the following morning, it was found that Charles and his friend Mr. Marsden had started after an early breakfast for Oxford.

Mr. Marsden's departure was expected, but this movement of Charles's was not

anticipated, and gave rise to much speculation.

"Dear boy," said Mrs. Compton, "I thought him looking very pale when he came into my room this morning, to say 'good bye!' and have no doubt, he had been up all night, he is so anxious to distinguish himself! and just now, he is working away prodigiously."

The morning passed heavily enough, every one "missed Charles," and even Mr. Marsden's ecclesiastical dissertations were remembered with something like regret. There was a slight shade over Leila's usually radiant face which somewhat puzzled me, and I mischievously placed an illuminated missal in her hand, at which she laughed heartily, and thanked me for the delicate attention.

Evelyn was full of her good-tempered sallies, and Captain Hawkes crosser than ever at some of them; so much so, that I began to suspect that the charms of the fair Evelyn were not lost upon him, but with a strange perversity common to some natures, the more his admiration increased, the more sour he became.

Mr. St. Leger persisted in mixing my colours for me whilst I was drawing, discoursing so well upon Art, the while, and giving me such charming accounts of foreign galleries, which he had visited, that I afterwards thought myself ungrateful for not better appreciating his kind efforts to amuse me.

I noticed several times that Caroline Fortescue's eyes glanced towards us, resting on me with no kindly expression, and a new light broke upon me in my darkness; but certainly Mr. St. Leger, if he saw the glance, appeared not to notice it.

Rose and Reginald sat on the same sofa, and carried on a desperate flirtation over a book of poetry, while Miss Rice did duty in general conversation for the whole party.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"I see the long procession  
Still passing to and fro,  
The young heart hot and restless  
And the old subdued and slow."

LONGFELLOW.

A WET day—a thorough, soaking, un-mistakeable wet day in an old country house! Who has not some pleasing recollections of such a day, far back in his joyous youth? A day when the heavens wept unceasingly, and presented an aspect of "unmitigated woe"—when everything out of doors wore the grey, heavy tint of gloom, and, "drip—drip," was the only sound that broke on the dull monotony of the oppressive scene—"drip—drip," from shivering trees, and leaky pipes, and projecting roofs; while in-doors all

was light and sunshine—laughter and jollity mirth and music—fun and flirtation.

Such days at Compton were always the merriest ; the library was ransacked, the books unceremoniously scattered about—games, charades, dancing, singing, story-telling, and billiard-playing, in turns amused us, and a merry party we were

On these occasions, Lady Bernard and Mrs. Compton usually sat apart in some quiet nook ; and it was a pleasant sight to see these two old ladies who had “ been friends together ” in early youth, so united in old age.

They never tired of talking over old times, of recalling scenes, and people known years ago, and commenting upon the changes of fashions and customs.

They were very unlike, and the stern simplicity—almost roughness of the one, contrasted strangely with the courtly suavity of the other.

But there was an understanding between them, a mutual appreciation ; Mrs. Compton, in all meekness looking up to her strong-minded friend for advice and counsel, and Lady Bernard, proud in the consciousness of

superior wisdom, bending from her elevation to pity and assist the little quiet lady whose weakness she despised.

They were speaking one day of Reginald, whose restless spirit caused his mother much anxiety.

"It is very bad," remarked Lady Bernard, "for any young man to be in such a position as to have nothing to do—how does he amuse himself?"

"You can see, my dear friend; when down here, which is only in the autumn, there is always a house full of company; and in town, of course, a young man never lacks amusement. I'm only afraid that he may get entangled in some speculations, and dangerous schemes, by getting into bad hands. I heard him speaking the other day of some West Indian project, and he mentioned the name of a Mr. Sniggleby—did you ever hear of it?"

"Yes."

"You have—and what sort of person is he?"

"O, a very respectable man."

"Indeed! I'm glad to hear that—and what—"

"I can't tell you anything about him further than that," said Lady Bernard, very abruptly.

"But that is sufficient, dear—I was only afraid lest my boy should have been making acquaintance with persons likely to lead him astray."

"He is of an age to take care of himself, is he not? what an anxious disposition you have. You cannot expect to keep him in leading-strings all his life."


"I do not wish it. I am desirous for him to marry and settle down quietly, and I have a little scheme in my head to that effect; but I wished first to ascertain what he had been doing in the way of enterprise—whether he had been involving himself in any way, and so forth, and I feel this to be a duty to the fair lady, as well as to him."

"What girl are you alluding to?"

"Your niece, dear—little Rose."

Lady Bernard started, frowned, and a shade of colour stole over her face.

"What nonsense and folly," she cried, "I hope you've not been putting that idea into her head."



"No, there was no necessity for my giving it to her."

"What do you mean?"

"Is it possible that you have not observed, what I am sure has been obvious enough to everyone—the attachment between them?"

The old lady looked surprised, exceedingly, and exclaimed, in a rude tone,

"Your son ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Lady Bernard!"

"Yes—he ought, if he has been engaging her affections without consulting me; and as to her, a little impudent minx, she shall return to the retirement of Serle, and shall not stir from it again, till she has learnt propriety. Ah! I foresaw this when I came, and was a great fool for coming near the place."

\* \* \* \*

That evening, Reginald took an opportunity of speaking to Lady Bernard upon the subject nearest his heart, not imagining, for an instant, that any obstacle would be raised to his wishes: he was wholly unprepared for the reception he met with.

He had known Rose Bernard, from her



childhood, had always been fond of her, calling her his "little wife" in his school-boy days, and after every absence, only saw fresh attractions in her guileless spirit, and soft, feminine charms; and though he had seen much greater beauty, had bowed to superior mental endowments and personal accomplishments, and had flirted as extensively as most men, yet he came to the conclusion, that for a wife, Rose was quite pretty, clever, and accomplished enough—that she was just what he wanted in fact, and that the sooner she was secured, the better.

Accordingly, "for form's sake," merely, he thought it would be proper to inform Lady Bernard of his intentions, and after a few preliminaries, opened the subject by saying: "how happy he felt himself to be at home in dear old Compton."

"I wonder you're not at home more, then," was the remark in reply.

The sharpness of the tone in which it was said, made Reginald give a look at the old lady's face, and he thought it wore a very unpromising expression. "Fit of indigestion, perhaps," he thought, "twinge of rheumatism—these old

women always have something the matter with them. *N'importe*, can't wait any longer.

"Why, you see, my dear Lady Bernard, I am not particularly wanted at home, and now is the time for seeing life, and enjoying myself; what could I do, buried here eternally? I should soon kill all the birds, catch all the fishes, and hunt down all the foxes in the country; and then—I put it to your ladyship—what resource would there be left? unless—" and he paused, "I were to marry. Of course, then, become a Benedict, with a charming spouse to enliven my drooping spirits, for I assure you, I am often *gemebundus*—"

"Sir?"

"Madam—as I was saying, with a spouse and a family of interesting little Comptons resembling their papa and mamma growing up around me, life anywhere would be enjoyable. In the Arabian desert—the steppes of Asia—wilds of Africa—backwoods of America—anywhere my dear Madam, I should be a happy man—never complain then of being *gemebundus*."

"For mercy's sake, man, do not use that heathenish word."

"But now, Lady Bernard, has it never struck you, that your charming niece has an influence over me which no other woman has?"

A gesture of impatience was the only answer, and that was unheeded.

"Such a sweet loveable creature she is!" he continued, "any man I should think, would be happy with her!" (a frown) "she does great credit to your admirable training" (symptoms of slight mollifying) "you must have been at great pains with her, Lady Bernard?"

"Yes, she has had every advantage, and I will not allow her to be spoiled by the absurd flattery you are always whispering in her ear!"

"I, my dear Madam! you mistake me entirely. I wouldn't spoil your niece for the world, I take too deep an interest in her remaining as unsophisticated as she is. I, in fact, am desirous of becoming her husband."

"You are, Sir?"

"Yes, indeed I am, and I shouldn't like a wife who knew too much; so don't be afraid of *my* spoiling her."

"The sooner, Sir, you get rid of your desires regarding my niece, the better—the sooner the better, Sir."

"Why so, Madam," said Reginald with much surprise;" then continued warmly; "that is out of my power—and I must beg to be informed of the grounds on which you object to my becoming the husband of your niece, it cannot be on the score of fortune, or of respectability, and I am not aware that there is anything in my private character to which you could raise such weighty objections: it is true," he said, after a pause, "I am no better than other men, and may in my time, have done many foolish things; but of course, when I marry—"

"You will be no better."

"That is saying too much, Lady Bernard," said Reginald, fairly roused by this unexpected opposition. "I have the feelings of a gentleman and of a man—I wish to behave as such. Miss Bernard herself does not oppose my wishes, and she is no longer a child, but, I believe, of age, and is capable of judging for herself; it would have been a want of courtesy on my part not to mention the subject to you—as the widow of her uncle, and the person with whom she has been brought up. I have done so: but knowing the feelings of Miss Bernard on the subject, I should be mean and

unmanly if I suffered any whimsical objections to stand in the way of our union."

Lady Bernard looked amazed at his audacity, and for a moment was silent, but she said at length :

" And suppose by your obstinate determination you compromise Miss Bernard's interests?"

" Do you mean pecuniary interests?"

" Yes—I have the power of disposing of my own property, and I suppose you are aware, that the handsome jointure left me by my husband, constitutes but a part of my income."

" Madam, you are at liberty to dispose of your property in whatever way you please ; I was not led by selfish motives to seek the hand of your niece, and if she feels as I have some reason for thinking she does, she will agree with me, that *my income is enough for both*."

" Then you are a couple of fools together," and with this polite finale, Lady Bernard, now heated with passion, commenced fanning herself with an enormous green fan, so energetically, as to put an end to further conversation.

Reginald sat musing for some time, then took his place again at the side of Rose.

" The impudent fellow !" said the old lady to herself.

## CHAPTER IX.

"These voices must grow tremulous with years,  
Those smiling brows must wear a tinge of gloom,  
Those sparkling eyes be quenched in bitter tears,  
And at the last close darkly in the tomb.  
If happiness depend on them alone  
How quickly is it gone!"

MARY A. BROWNE.

POOR Rose was marched off by her austere duenna the very next day, and I was to have accompanied them, but the opposition raised to my going was of so violent a nature, that even Lady Bernard was forced to submit.

I did not like remaining without Rose. I thought she would feel so lonely on her return home, with only her hard-natured aunt for a companion; but she did not seem very unhappy at the prospect, and appeared to wish

me to remain at Compton—so, with a good many kisses, and mutual promises of writing, we parted.

A week flew by—a pleasant week, varied by arrivals and departures ; amongst the latter, the Fortescues. Caroline having in vain assaulted the well cased heart of Mr. St. Leger, and made herself laughed at in consequence. Miss Rice, too, flitted off for a season, on the principle that “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” and having already made up her mind that Mr. St. Leger was desperately in love with her—she thought a short absence would be politic, and doubted not that at their next meeting, in an ecstasy at beholding her again, he would propose. I need not say—she intended accepting him.

Meanwhile, his attentions to myself were becoming the subject of general remark, though I did not know it. I thought certainly that he liked my society, or he would not have sought it, and I was pleased—highly gratified—my vanity flattered—my mind amused, but my tenderer feelings were untouched.

It was almost surprising ; for he was gifted

personally and mentally, and his manners were everything that the most fastidious could desire. I admired him—liked him—but as yet my heart sailed gallantly over a summer sea, and no waves of passion had disturbed its peace, and had I been questioned like Juliet of old.

“How stands your disposition to be married?”

I should have replied with her.

“It is an honour that I dream not of.”

Our party was now reduced in numbers, we missed Charles Compton’s pleasant songs, and tiresome arguments, and Reginald leaving suddenly, on the plea of important business, his lively sallies were remembered with pleasure, and his absence was regretted.

The departure of the Fortescues, too, left a void, and Miss Rice, with her comicalities, was not replaced, so our evenings were comparatively quiet. They were very pleasant, however, Mr. St. Leger could talk very well when he chose, and sometimes the name of his friend, Mr. Grey, slipped into the conversation, when I remember listening with particular interest, and wishing that he might



lose his way again, and favour Compton with his presence.

Leila I found once or twice peeping into a portfolio of drawings of church architecture, which had been left by Mr. Marsden, and making the wickedest remarks on Puseyite innovation. But there was one person, who in proportion as the numbers diminished, and the party became quieter, appeared to expand and develop himself, and this was Captain Hawkes.

He would station himself near Evelyn, to whom I think he fancied he was paying attention, not that his *petits soins* were really anything remarkable, but he would look thunder at any other gentleman who presumed to approach her, and in this manner seemed to guard her like a surly house-dog.

His observations were generally made with a sort of grunt of dissatisfaction, of a decidedly "hog-gish" tone, and his whole manner was anything but attractive.

I often wondered she did not try to rid herself of him; but, I did not then know woman's nature as I do now. The other girls all disliked Captain Hawkes, he had none of the

advantages of person which are usually admired by the fair sex. He was short, and rather inclined to corpulency—sharp-featured, the nose being long and pointed to a defect; eyes small, dark, and with a furtive glance which never sought yours; add to this, hair scanty in quantity, and approaching to red in colour, it will be admitted that he had but few personal advantages.

His mental gifts were not remarkable, and his manners being decidedly repulsive, and disposition questionable, made it the more strange that a girl like Evelyn—herself so good and beautiful, and accustomed to homage—should receive with something like pleasure, attentions, which he evidently meant to be indicative of his admiration.

But Evelyn was a true woman, she always leaned to the weaker side, and knowing that the gallant captain was not a general favourite, she inclined the more to him on that account.

His unpolished, gruff style, she designated “honest and bluff,” argued that in spite of a little mannerism she was “sure his heart was good,” and even personal advantages she could discover in him, which, however, she was

obliged to limit to the delicacy of his hands, and the assertion that he "looked like a gentleman."

And so far, she was right—a disagreeable specimen of the gentleman certainly, but one, nevertheless, and in our destitution of beaux, we were obliged to put up even with his grumpiness; but, as I have said, with the field to himself, it was wonderful how he came out of his shell.

Though of lazy habits usually, yet he managed to rise earlier, when he discovered that Evelyn was generally to be met with on the terrace walk before breakfast; and a pleasant walk that was, by the way, running the whole length of the garden on the side overlooking the country.

It was a good fashion of our ancestors, to have covered walks in their gardens for exercise in wet weather, with these high, dry, terraces for fair days; and the terrace walk at Compton was one of the pleasantest I can recall to mind.

It commanded a fine view of the surrounding country, which, though flat, was rich and fertile; and many pretty villages, each

with its ivied tower, or graceful spire rising from amongst clumps of dark trees ; while in the distance were discernible, the blue hills of F——shire.

Here I loved to walk each morning, while Leila fed her doves, and dear Evelyn gave audience to sundry poor people, who would come to tell their griefs to their ministering angel.

As we felt disposed, we sauntered in to breakfast—and this reminds me what pleasant breakfasts these were ! There was no scampering to be in time—we dropped in, just as we liked, or had it in our rooms.

Mrs. Compton never joined us, but Evelyn always presided, looking the personification of hospitality and kindness. She wore the daintiest bit of lace, scarcely to be dignified with the name of “cap,” giving her almost a matronly look, while it set off the clusters of soft, silky ringlets that shaded her sweet face.

The breakfast room was panelled like the rest of the house, with dark oak finely carved, and it looked out upon the fresh green paddock with its inclosure of trees.

A pleasant morning room it was ! and from

its windows too, we could see the postman wending his way towards the house with his missives of weal or woe.

"I do hope we shall hear from that boy, Charlie," said Evelyn, in quite a motherly sort of way, as she saw the aforesaid messenger, one morning.

"Miss Leila Compton!" said the servant, as he handed her a letter.

"Yes, really—it is Charles—how very refreshing!" she cried, and tore open the letter, adding, almost in a breath, as she gave it a hasty glance, "Oh, it's a stupid affair!"

His letters were generally much prized, so witty, chatty, and always containing something of interest; but this one, was not in his usual style, the gaiety was forced, and the letter was apparently written for form's sake.

Poor Charles! yet how angry he would have been, and how his proud heart would have chafed at the thought of being pitied.

I, too, had a letter, which I opened tremblingly, it was a letter from my guardian.

Lord D'Arville was at Paris, on his way to England, having resigned his diplomatic appointment on the ground of ill-health. His

letter was to announce the fact, and to say, that purposing to spend some time at D'Arville Castle, he wished me to meet him there—that he had written to ask Lady Bernard also to be his guest, but if she could not so honour him, I should have the pleasure of meeting at the Castle, my kind friend, Mrs. Dashington.

He added, that he had heard much of my improved appearance, and was desirous of judging for himself, both of my appearance and acquirements.

It was wrong, perhaps, but my heart swelled with a most rebellious feeling as I read. From a kind, affectionate father, such words would have raised different emotions—they would have awakened the earnest desire of being found all he wished, the sense, too, of being “cared for,” would have seemed sweet; but remembering the cold, distant being who had penned the words, I felt half inclined to wish that I might not fulfil his expectations.

## CHAPTER X.

"She's o'er the Border, and awa'  
Wi' Jock of Hazeldean!"

"Marry your daughters betimes, else they marry themselves."

OLD PROVERB.

"MAMMA ringing like that ! what can have happened ?" exclaimed Evelyn and Leila, and in a moment, both girls flew to their mother's room.

They found her in a state of great nervous excitement, sobbing hysterically with an open letter in her hand.

"So—so—unkind!" she sobbed out, "such a cruel letter from Jane."

"What is it, dearest mother?" said Evelyn.

Mrs. Compton pointed to the letter, which

was written in the formal hand-writing of Lady Bernard, and ran thus :—

“ Lady Bernard presents her compliments to Mrs. Compton, and requests to know whether or not she was aware of her son, Mr. Reginald Compton’s intention of eloping with Miss Bernard.

“ From certain remarks made to her, Lady Bernard is inclined to believe that Mrs. Compton was fully cognizant of her son’s intention, and Lady Bernard takes this opportunity of saying, that she considers such a course of conduct, as that pursued by Mrs. Compton, to be most unfriendly and dishonourable.”

“ Cruel ! is it not, my love ?” said the poor lady, feebly ; but the two girls were too much astounded at the *intelligence* conveyed in such an unkind manner, to think of the style of the note.

“ Can it really be true ?” cried Leila.

“ It is just like Reginald,” said Evelyn, “ so impetuous in feeling as he is, any opposition to his wishes would only make him ten times more determined to obtain all he wanted,



and I rather think he broached the subject to Lady Bernard, whilst she was here, and that the result of their conversation was not very satisfactory. I fancy so—from something Reginald said."

"But, Rose!" continued Leila, "could you have imagined her to be such a deep little puss! Well, I am very glad of it—dear little Rosie!"

"You see, mamma," said Evelyn in a cheerful tone, "it is good news, at which you are so affected."

"Yes, dears, I am glad as you are at their union. I have always wished it, but it vexes me that they should have gone off in such a clandestine manner, and that Jane should have written to me in such an unfeeling style."

"Oh! never mind Lady Bernard's note, mamma mia. I think it very insolent of her to write as she has done; but you know she is 'a strong minded woman,' and no doubt, she is dreadfully vexed and annoyed, and in her passion scarcely knew what she wrote."

"Can you fancy her in a passion?" said Leila in a tone of speculation.

"Yes—I saw her in one, once."

"And how did she look? turkey-cockish?"

"No—white—quite white, as if the fire raging within, had consumed all that was human and sanguineous in her composition, and left her looking like a stone."

"Poor dear Rosie! I hope she's safe somewhere! when shall we hear the particulars of this romantic affair!"

There could be no use in withholding the contents of Lady Bernard's note, so Mr. St. Leger and Captain Hawkes were soon in possession of the singular news.

The former was too much accustomed to weigh every word, to make any but commonplace remarks upon the subject, and to say that "he admired Compton's choice"—"charming girl, Miss Bernard"—"very spirited couple"—"hoped they would soon be reconciled to their relative," &c.

Captain Hawkes jerked out his observations more awkwardly than usual. "Bless me!" was one of them. "Pon my soul! who'd have thought it!" and something he said which sounded like "rum go!" a strange mode of expression, which I could not com-

prehend ; but he was such an odd man, that at times, he was incomprehensible.

The day passed very heavily—all feeling more or less unsettled and uneasy, and Mrs. Compton was so poorly from the morning's excitement, as to be obliged to keep her room.

The following day brought me a sharp summons from Lady Bernard to return immediately. "She presumed," the letter ran, "that as Mrs. Compton had shown such great kindness in preventing my return to Serle, she would now be equally kind in assisting me to do so without delay. And this would be effected by allowing her coachman to drive me to E——, where I should be met by Parsons, Lady Bernard's man, with the carriage."

So a sad "adieu" I made to my kind gentle friends, and with a heart strangely oppressed, and eyes dimmed by tears, I drove away from that home which I had learnt to think the happiest I had ever seen.

Not alone, however ; Leila accompanied me to E—, and the two gentlemen rode on horseback as our cavaliers.

Captain Hawkes, I fancy, thought that

Evelyn was to have accompanied us, as he grumbled very much on finding she was not going, and after making several snappish observations, at last took offence at something that was said, (said, without the least idea of offending), and sank into a state of profound sulkiness.

Of all things in nature, a sulky person is one of the most odious, and under the present circumstances, the presence of the bearish Captain was especially disagreeable, so we were not sorry when, after riding some miles in this unamiable spirit, he recollected "he had letters to write," was also afraid his "horse was going lame," and that we must part company as he must return, which he forthwith did.

Mr. St. Leger was always riding on my side of the carriage, pointing out different objects of interest, and his manner I thought particularly kind as he did so ; seeing, I suppose, that I was out of spirits, he exerted himself to cheer me, and when transferred to Lady Bernard's carriage at E—, I was bidding him "good bye !" he said he hoped it would not be long ere we met again. "I shall renew the ac-

quaintance which I had a few years ago with Lord D'Arville," he added, in explanation, "and then I may, perhaps, have the pleasure of meeting his fair ward at D'Arville Castle!"

"I hope so!" I exclaimed, with much warmth, "indeed you must come."

A shake of the hands—a flutter of handkerchiefs—and I pursue my lonely way; musing the while upon the incidents of the last few weeks, recalling every scene to mind, and thereby renewing many pleasurable sensations. I could hardly then have said with Burns:

"Pleasures are like poppies spread,  
You seize the flower—the bloom is shed!  
Or like the snow, falls in the river,  
A moment white, then melts for ever;  
Or like the borealis race,  
That flit ere you can point the place;  
Or like the rainbow's lovely form  
Evanishing amid the storm."

For there seemed almost as great a charm in the retrospective glance at joys gone-by, as in the warm, glowing reality, and pondering thus sweetly and lovingly upon Compton and its inmates, I arrived once more at Serle Park.

I shall not dwell much upon the time I spent there. On my arrival, I was informed

by Smith, that Lady Bernard had retired to rest, and this I was not sorry to hear, knowing her to be in anything but an amiable mood.

The following morning, she received me at breakfast with a most constrained manner. Her cold *hauteur* struck me painfully, and I could only conclude from it, that she in some way implicated me in her niece's affair.

We sat in silence, till, the morning meal concluded, she informed me, that she had heard from my guardian, and that it was his wish I should join him immediately at D'Arville Castle.

I ventured to ask Lady Bernard if she accompanied me, she answered abruptly "no," and turning, left the room, muttering as she did so.

"I'll have no more girls left in my charge!"

\* \* \* \*

How, looking back down the long vistas of memory, certain points like way-marks stand out—an hour—a scene we never forget!

One of these is my first impression of my guardian's ancestral home.

It was within a few hours' drive of Serle, and I started thence one afternoon, alone.

The day had been stormy, and as the dusk of evening crept on, a low wind moaned dolefully amongst the branches of the trees, stripping them of the few leaves which still remained.

Now and then, a sudden gust would send showers of them across the road, and whirling round in little eddies with their mournful, rustling sound, they at last would settle in deep beds by the wayside.

I was amusing myself, as the gloom increased, by fancying the leafless boughs as they swung to and fro, to be assuming all manner of fantastic shapes, and was falling into a train of musing; when I was startled from my reverie by stopping suddenly at the Lodge gates.

I had time to notice that the Lodge was a most fanciful affair, and then the gates were swung open, and we were driving through the park, with the Castle full in view.

That grim, dark castle!

The sun was setting in a pale, watery yellow sky, and above him hung masses of heavy clouds—layer upon layer—foretelling rain for the morrow. Clearly defined against the light

portion of the sky, stood the Castle—a very, very gloomy looking pile, ornamented with towers of various sizes, each of which was surmounted by a cupola of some metal, and these cupolas reflected in a sickly hue, the sky's pale colour.

Dark woods rose around the building, the sombre fir being strikingly conspicuous, raising its branching arms above its fellows of the forest, and adding to the heavy effect of the scene.

At the entrance to his princely dwelling, my guardian stood to receive me. Yes! there he was—the same piece of buckram, the same cold formality in his manner as he handed me from the carriage, and said, as if we had parted but the day before :

“How do you do, Miss Brand? You should not have come alone, though,” he added quickly, “badly managed.”

Naturally chilly, I had, on this damp, miserable evening, muffled myself up in warm shawls, and drawn a thick veil over my face ; and no sooner did I find myself in-doors, than asking to be shown to my room, I repaired thither immediately.



In a few minutes, I was honoured by a visit from Mrs. Dashington.

"*Ma chère petite*," she began, (I was about a head and shoulderstaller than herself), "what made you rush off so hastily? Lord D'Arville is in despair—says you would not give him one glimpse of your face, which he is dying to see."

I laughed, and answered: "It is pinched with the cold, and elongated with *ennui*, so perhaps you will kindly get me 'let off' for to-night, and tell him that he will see it to better advantage to-morrow."

Mrs. Dashington hesitated, and for a moment seemed disposed to press the point, but was too indolent, I suppose, for with a suppressed yawn, she said:

"Very well—there's the dinner bell, so if you will not come, I must say adieu! I believe they've got a *femme de chambre* for you. I hope she's as good a one as mine, for really I don't know what I should do without Julie; she thinks for me, does everything—invaluable creature! what a lovely ring that is on your finger! a perfect darling!"

"It is a rare gem, and curiously set, one of

many similar ones that were my mother's—good night, Mrs. Dashington.”

Distressing dreams haunted me that night, waking from one scene of horror, I only fell asleep again to dream something still more terrible.

Now, seemingly surrounded by demoniacal forms, who unceasingly pursued me, turn which way I would, their grinning faces met mine—then I sank oppressed by gloomy terrors, the grand climax of which was, the castle crumbling to pieces, and crushing me in its ruins. I woke at length to find my maid at the bedside, asking me if she should bring my breakfast.

“Mrs. Dashington always had it in her room, and the gentlemen breakfast alone.” Whilst she goes to prepare it, I may as well describe this attendant—this “indispensable” nuisance.

She was not at all like a servant, there was a certain style in the face, an educated look in the play of the features, which struck me at once, and when first she presented herself to me, I looked inquiringly at her.

“I am Beavor, your maid,” was all she said.

"Very abrupt," I thought, and surveyed her more attentively.

I found she was doing the same by me, and in a cool, easy manner, that made me feel quite indignant. She ~~was~~ by no means good-looking; the expression of her countenance was so sharp, as to be positively disagreeable.

Her figure, however, was pretty, and her dress, which was unusually good for a person in her position, was in perfect taste. There was something about her particularly repulsive to me, and I felt certain she read my feelings, and felt supremely indifferent as to their nature.

She assisted me to dress, expressing her approbation of my habiliments, or the reverse, as the case might be, in the most unreserved manner, and in a tone of familiarity which I could ill brook.

I assumed some dignity of manner, but I found that would not do, it only brought a lurking sneer to her face, or an impudent half-smile; and I felt quite relieved, when, the task of dressing over, she left me once more in peace. I wondered much how my guardian could have selected such a strange person for my attendant.

## CHAPTER XI.

"The stately homes of England,  
How beautiful they stand;  
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,  
O'er all the pleasant land.  
The deer across their greensward bound,  
Thro' shade and sunny gleam,  
And the swan glides past them, with the sound  
Of some rejoicing stream."

HEMANS.

D'ARVILLE Castle was quite a show-place in its neighbourhood, though not possessed of the prestige of antiquity, it being a structure of comparatively modern date.

The grandfather of my guardian had rebuilt the Castle, carrying out his own ideas of architectural beauty, which were somewhat fantastic.

Still the effect was good, although French

windows were not in accordance with Moorish domes and cupolas. There was a solidity, a grandeur about the edifice, with its heavy towers and frowning battlements, which needed but the further enhancement of the colour of the dark red sandstone, of which it was built, to give it an appearance of positive solemnity.

Internally, the taste displayed was better, and when, on my first morning there, I wandered through the grand "state rooms," which ran the whole length of the house at the back, I was almost dazzled by the magnificence and beauty of some of the apartments.

There was the grand saloon, the ball-room, concert-room, picture-gallery, and numerous smaller reception-rooms, the fittings up of which were most gorgeous; the painted ceilings delighted me, and many a rare cabinet and precious inlaid table caught my roving eye.

The pictures, too! what a feast! delicious Claudes that looked painted with sunbeams—Rembrandts, with their grand depth of warm shadow—Vandykes, with those thin, oval faces and piercing eyes, that look through you ;

•

and the three wives of Rubens, painted by their admiring husband, in the full splendour of their voluptuous beauty.

The bold favourites of Lely's pencil, with Carlo Dolce's soft Magdalens were there, besides scenes of quaint beauty by "Vans" innumerable ; and the wild, gloomy productions of Salvator Rosa.

It was before one of the latter I was standing—a savage, daring depiction of a mountain storm, which had carried back my memory to similar Swiss scenes, when hearing a heavy tread, I looked up, and saw my guardian, who was steadfastly regarding me.

His face wore a surprised, and I thought, pleased look, but it abashed me greatly, and I advanced to greet him with my eyes cast down and the consciousness of an awkward manner.

"What a shame it was of you," he began, "to run away so, last night—really, Miss Brand, (or Isola, I suppose I may call you), one would think I was some monster, that I frightened you so—well what do you think of the monster's den? it is not such a bad place after all, is it?"

"O, it is most beautiful!" I exclaimed,

"these rooms are splendid, and the pictures, I am enchanted with."

"I see, you are an *enthusiast* in your admiration—there is a freshness of feeling about you, Isola, which is quite reviving to me, and—how you blush! 'pon my life, never saw anything so unsophisticated in my life!—did you, Grey?"

Previous to this interrogatory, I had become aware of the presence of a third person, whom I had not noticed in the confusion into which I was thrown, by my first glimpse of Lord D'Arville. It was Mr. Grey, the "benighted traveller" of Compton memory.

Thus addressed, he stepped forward, with an expression of annoyance on his face, which I construed favourably for his good feeling. He evidently recognized me, and was about to speak, when Lord D'Arville turning to him, said, "By the bye, I've not introduced you to my ward—Mr. Grey, Miss Brand."

I stole one glance at the face of my new acquaintance, to see if he despised the young silly girl who blushed, and though there was a thoughtful and rather peculiar expression in his face which I could not fathom, yet, the

kindly eye that met mine ought to have reassured me.

But my proud heart was swelling within me, and it was with the greatest difficulty I maintained my composure.

"We have met before, I think," was the remark he made, as he bowed to me.

I blurted out a "yes."

My guardian shrugged his shoulders, as he muttered something about "Parisian manners," and an ironical smile played over his wiry lips.

"I've a good deal to talk to you about Miss Brand," he said. "I suppose you anticipate the subject matter."

I said faintly—"no," and shook my head.

"You don't, eh? Well then, it's this affair of Miss Bernard and Mr. Compton—it's very mysterious, and as far as *you* are concerned in it, the sooner it's cleared up, the better."

"As *I* am concerned? What does your lordship mean?" I exclaimed, haughtily, my shyness gone.

"What I *say*, 'as far as you are concerned,' Miss Brand; you will not persuade



me but what you were in that young lady's confidence, and were fully acquainted with her intention of marrying that fellow, Compton, in defiance of my aunt's threats."

"Indeed, Sir, I knew nothing about it. I was as ignorant as yourself of the state of the case, and as much astounded as any one else at the news."

"Nonsense, I won't believe that."

"Has Lady Bernard—" I began.

"Lady Bernard," he interrupted, "rightly judged, that two girls could not be as intimate as you and her niece were, without the feelings, aye, and the plans too, of the one, being pretty well known to the other; and it was your duty, under such circumstances, to have given information to Lady Bernard upon the subject."

"Permit me to say Lord D'Arville, that your views and mine differ on that point."

"Ah! they differ, do they?" cried he, triumphantly. "I thought so, should you not say that I am right—and that that girl knows all about it, Grey?"

I glanced anxiously at Mr. Grey; he was looking down with an expression of positive

pain, and it was some moments before he answered.

"Really, Lord D'Arville," he said, at length, "I do not think that follows; indeed, I should rather incline to the belief that Miss Bernard would *not* take a friend into her confidence, at all events, not so young a one."

I felt grateful for this little assistance, and turning to my guardian, I again addressed him.

"You have greatly mistaken my character," I said, warmly, "I could not stoop to the baseness of telling a falsehood upon the subject. I told you, I knew nothing about it, and you must take the assertion, once for all. But, had I been made the confidante of my friend, the same feeling which makes me now above telling a lie, would have made her secret safe in my bosom. I could not have turned traitor to my friend, though I should have endeavoured to dissuade her from taking such an imprudent step."

"All very fine. You can talk I see—how these women prate! and look at her, Grey! a perfect little devil, 'pon my soul!"

This was too much; accustomed as I had

been, to kindness and consideration all my life, this coarse manner of my guardian's was so strange to me, that I felt quite overwhelmed with amazement, and disgust. What sort of life was before me!

One moment longer, and I should have lost all control over myself, so I hastily left the room, and in the solitude of my chamber, I gave way to one of those passionate bursts of weeping, which youth only knows.

What a humiliating scene had I just gone through! What a hateful man my guardian was! Never could I forgive or forget his baseness in suspecting me of an untruth! What a dark mind his must be, to imagine such blackness in mine! And then sharper than all, pierced one thought, with which I scarcely dared to grapple—all this before that stranger—that Mr. Grey!

How was it that with regard to this particular person, my imagination had been employed in such a novel and unaccountable manner? I had seen him but once—yet had been weaving strange fancies round his name, and wishing to meet him again. And it was thus we had met!

It seemed as if the mysterious interest excited in my mind respecting him, was the foreshadowing of the present moment of painful feeling—a moment in which years seemed concentrated.

I wished I had never seen this man who was to cause me such suffering, and it made me almost hate him, to think that he had witnessed my humiliation. Yet, now and then would come the memory of his kind look, as his eye met mine, and, thinking upon that, I could not quite hate him.

And then I wept again more bitterly than ever.

## CHAPTER XII.

*Margarete.*—Beschämt nur steh' ich vor ihm da,  
Und sag' zu allen Sachen ja.  
Bin doch ein arm unwissend Kind,  
Begreife nicht, was er an mir find't.

FAUST.

How long I remained weeping, I know not, for I felt half stupified at length ; but I was roused by Beever coming to tell me that " his lordship was enquiring for me."

I bade her tell him, that I had a bad headache, and should not appear at dinner.

Long—long afterwards I learnt, that to the intercession of my new friend, I was indebted for not being compelled to make my appearance.

I did not do so, during the rest of that day.

The following morning, I believe, I looked the mere shadow of myself when I joined the gentlemen in the breakfast room ; so much had the excitement of the previous day wrought upon me, that I felt quite faint and tottering. Mr. Grey rose hastily as I entered, and enquiring gently how I did, placed a chair for me next his own. How strangely I trembled when he took my hand ! I dared not lift my eyes for very shame, and the words of thanks I ought to have uttered, died upon my lips.

Mr. Dashington was eating his muffin, and reading the newspaper. My guardian wished me a cold " Good-morning," and said,

" You look ill, what is the matter with you to-day ?"

I felt so weak and nervous, that had I attempted to speak, I should have burst into tears, (wretched feeling), and not immediately answering him, he said,

" Come, Isola, no sulks, or by—"

" What does your lordship think of that speech of Palmerston's ? It's to the purpose, is it not ?" said Mr. Grey, and his voice calm and low, was that of a man who had perfect control over himself.

The question put with the kind intention of diverting my guardian's attention from me, had its effect, and a conversation on politics followed, during which I had leisure to collect my scattered thoughts.

"Well, little Missie," said Mr. Grey presently, handing me his tea-cup, "what do you think of this place? Have you ever been here before?"

"Little Missie!" what a mode of address! It was evident then that he looked upon me as a *child*—this was the effect my guardian's reproof had had;—my cheek was again crimsoned with shame, I thought I hated Mr. Grey very much, and answered shortly, "No," to his enquiry, but he did not seem to mind my pique, and continued:

"If you are not acquainted with the beauties of the neighbourhood, I must be your cicerone, I can take you some charming walks; quite allowable, Lord D'Arville, is it not?"

"O, certainly, only don't let her elope," was the reply, which was accompanied by a malicious side-look at me.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Grey; "I shall expect you, young lady, to put on your

hat, or what do you call it—bonnet, presently, and commit yourself to my care.”

I did as I was bid, for there was an indefinable something about my new friend, which seemed to influence me, even against my will. I seemed almost afraid of going with him, and yet, refuse, I could not.

A very pleasant walk he took me, through the park, and a tangled wood with its mossy paths, and through the old church-yard to the little church.

We procured the keys from the sexton, and spent an hour or more in examining the splendid tombs of the D'Arville family, and in sketching the most picturesque parts of the building.

It was a beautiful little church, built in the days when our forefathers were lavish in their expenditure upon their temples. Built, too, it was, far away from any habitation, in the centre of a wood, and its deep-toned bell was used to toll in the raging storm as a guide to the benighted wanderer. The wood had disappeared ages ago, and so had the Priory, though the ruins of the latter still remained and looked picturesque upon the grassy bank, that sloped down to the water.



And round the church had clustered a hamlet, composed of pretty cottages—very pretty, (though somewhat fanciful), the will of my lord being, that none but pretty cottages should be built on his domain.

The interior of the church was highly interesting; the richly stained windows, evidences of many a princely gift, sent the sun-rays glimmering softly in prismatic hues upon the rare tessellated pavement, and falling in mellowed light upon magnificent marble tombs, where reposed the dust of the proud D'Arvilles of the past. They were finely carved tombs, chiefly of marble, with representations of a procession of monks and nuns encircling them—a knight and a lady reclining, with arms meekly folded, and a dog for a foot-rest.

These were their ancestors of the feudal and Tudor times, then came others without Romish symbols, attired in the stiff dress of the days of the Commonwealth and Puritanism; and so, step by step, you traced them, till you came to the plain tablets, and unsculptured tombs of recent erection.

Then there was the D'Arville pew, if such it could be called, for it was a room with a fire-place in it, *chaise longues*, footstools, and

every comfort. It was formed out of a small side chapel, and through an arched opening, you could catch a glimpse of the humbler worshippers, and of the minister, and a stretch of pillars with tattered banners waving, and these noble marble monuments in their stern cold pride.

The chapel was lighted by a window of gloriously tinted glass, where the arms of the D'Arvilles were emblazoned ; for even in their worship of the Great Creator, they could not dispense with their "gules," "lions rampant," &c. ; and I could well fancy that my guardian would find as much pleasure in doing worship here, when the sacred apartment was filled with the *élite* of his friends, on a Sunday morning in autumn, as on attending his box at the Opera on Saturday nights in the season.

The romance of the place charmed me, and I kept flitting from point to point to get the best view.

During the whole time, my companion was questioning me upon all manner of subjects—my previous life, education, feelings, fancies, &c., and though, from the unfortunate affair of

the previous day, I felt very shy and awkward, and that scene was never touched upon, yet, on all other matters, he contrived to bring out my mind.

Still, I did not feel at ease with him. He would draw my arm through his, ask me so kindly, if I felt tired, telling me to lean on him, if I did, that I wonder I did not lose my embarrassment ; but his kindness seemed only to increase it. I felt that he must think me such a "silly little goose."

Poor, proud Isola ! yet you felt a new, sweet feeling of protection, while you passed your arm so timidly through his, and though you dared not look him full in the face, yet, the glance you stole at those deep, earnest eyes, though not sufficient to tell you their colour, told you that he did not believe all that your guardian would intimate respecting you, and that you need not be afraid of him—why was I ?

\* \* \* \*

There was a dinner party at the Castle that day, and the question was agitated by Mrs. Dashington whether or not I ought to make

my appearance, as I had not yet made my *début* properly in society. It was at length decided that I might have a place at table.

"Though the toilette of the dear child, should be as simple as possible," observed Mrs. Dashington.

Accordingly, in white muslin and ivy-leaves I made my appearance. Beever had tried to be facetious about "owls and ivy," wishing to substitute roses, but I clung pertinaciously to my dark, shining leaves.

Amongst the party assembled, I did not feel at home at all ; the men were all either insufferable coxcombs, or stupid old dolts, and the women in their way were no better. They were so much in the style of Mrs. Dashington, which was a decidedly bad style—that is to say, dressed in good taste, and evidently making it the grand business of life ; but on all other subjects, save the adornment of their poor, perishing bodies, ignorant as dolls ; whilst in mind and manner they were silly and affected to an extravagant degree.

There were some very pretty ones amongst them, however, and such large, soft, languishing oriental looking eyes, or such marvellously

regular eyebrows, I had never seen before—knowing nothing then in my simplicity, of the wonderful effects of *poudre pyromée*, and *surmah*. Their complexions, however, I did think suspicious.

Beyond an observant look from each, I did not receive any notice from the ladies, for feeling coldly, no doubt, I looked so; and mine was not a prepossessing countenance under chilly influences.

At table, I could not help observing the superiority of Mr. Grey to every other gentleman present, both in manner and conversation; and there was something about him, which seemed to give him an influence over others, that was quite unaccountable. They all listened to him attentively, asked his opinion, or yielded a point as if compelled to do so. To some, this gift of influence is allotted, and a precious, or a pernicious one it generally proves.

From the conversation at table, and the remarks of the ladies in the drawing-room afterwards, I found that Mr. Grey was a man well-known throughout the length and breadth of the land, as a powerful speaker in the

House: he was the ardent supporter of all liberal measures, and a zealous reformer.

“What was he like?” I hear the reader say.

He was not “a duck of a man,” little Miss; nor “a splendid fellow,” Miss Jack; nor everybody’s “old boy;” but I think you would have admired him notwithstanding.

Though not striking in person, yet you would not have passed him by; the face so full of intellectual beauty, so expressive of high-mindedness and good feeling was worth a second glance; and the broad white Norman forehead, with its short black, clustering curls, was in itself a study. Of the magical charm of his rich-toned, finely modulated voice, I have already spoken.

His mind seemed capable of grappling with every subject that came beneath his notice, and possessed the rare quality of combining versatility with depth of thought. The only deficiency I noticed in Mr. Grey, was his inability for “small talk” with ladies; but the dear creatures appeared quite content, if they could get him to listen to *their* nonsense, and he had a quiet way of obliging them, of let-

ting them run on while he appeared intently listening, which charmed them, unconscious as they were, that while so occupied, his thoughts were often far enough away. There was one thing about him, however, which I could not help noticing, and in doing so, drawing a favourable contrast between him, and the rattling fops—the ladies' monkeys around.

However careless he might be in storing his mind with the small conceits, the lively nothings, which some men think necessary to insure their success with the fair—in attention to their real comfort, in delicate respectful homage, no man could surpass Mr. Grey; and this I do believe was in great part the reason, why in spite of the said incapacity for talking nonsense, he was such a general favourite with women. They all sought him.

Many of the dinner guests came to remain some days at the Castle, so that it was with more than ordinary interest I noticed them; but, with one or two exceptions, I could have wished they had all been returning home the same evening.

As to Lord D'Arville, he was a suitable host

for such company. He looked as stiff as a tailor's dummy block, attired in a style much too juvenile for him, and there was a creaking noise attendant on every movement of his unbendable form, which was conclusive of his having resorted to an article of female dress for keeping his poor body in shape.

In every way, he was "made up" by the arts to which young elderly gentlemen resort to disfigure themselves, and though he imagined that his powers of fascination were increased by this elaborate toilet, I, for one, only felt disgust at the result of his efforts.

His lordship, in conversation with gentlemen, did not shine at all, and seemed to consider it rather a bore than otherwise when any remark of an intellectual nature was addressed to him, which he was expected to answer; but with his fair friends he seemed more at his ease, whispering compliments in the ear of one, and looking tenderly with his fishy eye at another.

I despised him.

In the drawing-room, Mr. Grey joined me several times during the evening, looking at me occasionally with an expression of such



anxiety on his countenance, that I was puzzled.

"How haughty the little lady looks to-night!" he said on one occasion. "You ought to be a countess at the least. I think I shall call you 'the countess.'"

"Very impertinent," I thought, but I did not say so, blushed and curled my lip, I think.

"What will your ladyship do," he went on, "when the company leave and you are left here by yourself? It will be very dull for you."

"O, no," I answered, "only quiet, I shall look at the pictures, read the books, and wander about in the woods; and I shall have better companionship, than I should if the Castle were always filled with guests like the present."

"You're inclined to be satirical I see," Mr. Grey remarked, "but will you pardon me, if I caution you not to indulge that spirit to excess, as it will raise you up many enemies."

"Thank you, Mentor," I replied to myself; but the words did not pass my lips, I could not take the liberty of calling Mr. Grey

by any name but his own : it was very strange what an extravagant amount of respect I felt for him, and how the very thought of him influenced me.

"Your friend, Mr. St. Leger," I said demurely, "entertains different opinions : he thinks that the cultivation of the art of criticism has an improving tendency."

"St. Leger ! O, has he been endeavouring to convert you to his theory ? It is a dangerous one for a young lady to put in practice."

I pouted, "Mr. St. Leger is an exceedingly agreeable person."

"Exceedingly so ; you show good taste in admiring him."

\* \* \* \*

Our walk to the little church, was not the only ramble we had together : the woods of D'Arville witnessed many such. The fair ladies at the Castle in vain laid schemes to entrap Mr. Grey as their cavalier in rides or drives, or at least it was very seldom they succeeded, and then I was always of the party.

He, like myself, preferred "the pathless woods" just then ; it was so pleasant, wander-

ing us two together there ; he telling me of something wonderful which he had seen in foreign lands, a pointing out beauties in nature, which I had never observed before ; or perchance questioning me about my thoughts and feelings in his peculiar way. I, walking by his side, leaning on his arm, an attentive listener, but a timid, almost trembling speaker. I could not divest myself of the fear I entertained of him, if fear it was, but I think now, the feeling was more like reverence and awe.

Those woodland walks were very, very pleasant ! and so were our rambles by the lake, when the sun gleamed down upon the smooth waters, and the white swans reined in their graceful heads and glided gently to our feet.

“ How sweet to pass a life thus ! ” was the thought that sometimes occurred to me, wandering on, talking thus, for ever ! But the hours were not all thus lightly winged at D’Arville ; the wet days—I used to enjoy wet days before, at Compton, they were almost pleasanter than the others ; but here they were simply disagreeable, for every one

stayed in-doors, and if my eye sought the companion of my walks, he was generally surrounded by a bevy of ladies, and if by any chance, we happened to be alone together, it was only for a moment; some discordant third was sure to join us.

And the evenings, I never liked. I invariably felt rather cross, or anxious, feverish, or miserable. Why, I could not tell, but I think now it must have been, because—but, really I do not see why I should reveal every weakness of my undisciplined heart, suffice it, that if an error, or a weakness, it was atoned for by the tears shed when I felt once more alone.

Pride and passion! fearful elements in the human heart!

At these times, I scarcely knew whether I was pleased with Mr. Grey or not, but I know I felt very angry with myself. His manner though, could be very tiresome when he chose.

“I dare say,” he said one night, “you’ll be very glad when I’m gone. I’m a stupid fellow, am I not, countess? Can’t do anything to amuse your ladyship.”

"I do not want you to."

"Don't you? you ladies generally require to be amused, if it is only by hearing your own silvery voices."

"I do not belong to that class of persons," I said with a slight laugh.

"No," he answered, "no—you're free from that fault of your sex. I've found out a good point in you, you see, and," he added in a lower tone, "I've found out more than that in your young ladyship."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, a vague apprehension filling me with confusion.

"Yes!" he replied, with an earnest look in my face, "and if I don't mistake, you have read me pretty well ere this?"

I turned quickly, that the light from the lamp should not fall with so full a glare upon my face; and felt relieved when, just afterwards, a young lady came up, and our conversation was interrupted.

The next time he addressed me, I experienced a feeling to which I had hitherto been a stranger. It was in connexion with him, but whether it was a feeling of increased liking, or of dislike, I could not tell, only I

know that he never could persuade me to take woodland walks with him again; that I rather avoided him than otherwise, and yet, when the day over, I was wont to retire to my own chamber, I would chide myself for my stupidity in thus shunning my kind friend; and counted with ever increasing regret the few remaining days of his visit.

One evening—I knew he was to leave the following day, and I was trying to think I should not miss him, and endeavouring to still certain flutterings at my heart, when he joined me as I sat looking over a portfolio of prints at a small table, apart from the rest of the company.

“I want to know, Missie, why you have treated me so scornfully of late,” he began, “how have I offended your ladyship that you have withdrawn from my society, eh? how is it?”

I muttered something not very intelligible.

“Is it that I am such a very disagreeable old fellow?”

I smiled at the idea.

“Well,” he said, “I am going to release you from my unwelcome society, very shortly—I leave to-morrow morning.”

“Must you go so soon?”

“Yes, I am going abroad on some business matters next week, and if we shall ever meet again is very uncertain,” and he sighed. “We were talking of Shakspeare the other day,” he continued, “will you accept a volume I have with me, containing his works? the print is small, but to your bright eyes, that is nothing.”

I hesitated—for though, of course, under other circumstances, I should have declined the gift instantly, it was proferred so simply and kindly, that it seemed like affectation to refuse its acceptance.

“But, of course, you’ll take it, and then, when I am on the other side of the world, it may serve to remind you of that stupid Mr. Grey, who used to teaze you so—so, adieu! as I shall leave very early to-morrow morning, and who knows,” he added, “but you may be a countess, really, before I come back! well, good bye!”

“Good bye!” and so we parted; but his parting look haunted me for many a day.

## CHAPTER XIII.

"'Twas pretty,—though a plague  
To see him every hour : to sit and draw  
His arched brows, his hawking eye—his curls  
In our heart's table ; heart too capable  
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour :  
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous frenzy  
Must sanctify his relics."

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

"Society is now one polished horde,  
Form'd of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bor'd."

BYRON.

THERE seemed a strange void in the house the next day, though it was full of company, though silks rustled in the corridors, and gay ladies sailed by. Every now and then, the sound of laughter fell on the ear, but it had no merriment in it, no heart-joy ; and with all the dressing and dining, and every-day



routine of a large establishment going on, it seemed to me very desolate and lonely.

Yes! there was not one soul in that great house who cared a sou for me, so to me, it was desolate.

Once or twice, I joined groups of dresses and millinery; but feathers and flouncings, the beauty of this lady, or the bad taste of the other, with gossip and scandal of a most flagrant description, was all I heard—no, once, I heard some comments on myself.

"Flora," (to Mrs. Dashington,) "I wonder, dear, you are not jealous of Miss Brand."

"Why, my love?" asked that lady, languidly, not thinking there was a being in the world of whom she need be jealous.

"Did you not hear what those men said of her last night? that she was 'beautiful as an angel, though a dark one.'"

"And do you think that was paying her a compliment, dear?"

"O, they said much more than that, about her; but what rather amused me, was their saying she was so 'charmingly natural'—it struck me as a useful hint."

"But we all know," said Mrs. Dashington,

with the air of one who was an authority on the subject, "that men like nature in a woman—a pretty woman, at least; why, do you know," she continued, laughing affectedly, "I have had more compliments made to me on one point, than on anything else."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, but mine is nature cultivated, which is much nicer than being semi-barbarous."

Her companion laughed.

"Barbarous, or not," she said, "men are such uncertain creatures, there's no knowing what they like, and I really think that girl, if she chose to make the most of herself—"

"Oh, my dear love!" cried Mrs. Dashington, somewhat fluttered, "she could never do that, I never saw a girl so behindhand in the *je ne sais quoi*—the art of attraction, in my life."

"I don't know, she's deep enough," was the acute remark of the other, "in one sense, at least." The lady was evidently perplexed between her desire of annoying her dearest friend, Mrs. Dashington, by flattering me, and the natural detractive qualities of her mind, which made her avoid praising any one more than she could help.

"Of course, you know," she continued, "she has no taste, no manner, nor anything of that sort; no idea of dressing herself, and so on; but as I said before, men are such strange creatures, that a wild Indian sent in amongst them might send them all raving with ecstasy, and Lord D'Arville—this guardianship, from its novelty, must be rather amusing to him, and—"

Mrs. Dashington used her vinaigrette, and requested her friend not to talk so loud—"my poor nerves!" she pleaded.

Once or twice, advances were made to me by some of these people, but they were met so coldly, that I fear my manner amounted almost to repulsion. I roamed about the great, gloomy apartments alone, or sauntered in the grounds, laid out as pleasure gardens at the back of the Castle, whilst a weight—a sense of loneliness oppressed me, which was almost painful. At length, I found myself in the blue drawing-room, on the spot where I had been sitting on the previous evening, where I said "adieu" to Mr. Grey. On the little table, lay a small packet addressed to me.

I opened it eagerly, and found it to consist

of the "Shakspeare," the promised parting gift ;—between the leaves was a note.

"Dear Countess !

"Do not curl your lip so disdainfully, but accept this trifling *souvenir*, and deign to think occasionally of the donor, who, with the regret at parting from your ladyship, mingles the hope of one day meeting you again.

"Whether you are then a real countess or not, he will still be,

"Your well-wisher,

"LIONEL GREY."

Why did I hasten with the packet to my chamber—lock the door—peruse the queer little note again and again, and at length put it carefully by with my "jewels," "relics," and precious things? A most foolish, unnecessary proceeding it was !

\* \* \* \*

Well, a week or two passed, I hardly know how ; I was too listless to notice, when, one morning, I received a letter written in the fine, beautiful, unmistakeable hand of Leila Compton.

It was a sparkling effusion, for Leila was a talented girl, and her letters reflected her bright sunny mind perfectly. News had been received of the "Reginald Comptons," duplicates of their marriage having been sent to Mrs. Compton, and also to Lady Bernard.

They wrote from Paris, and appeared quite wild in their happiness. Rose was delighted with everything she saw, and revelling in her new feeling of freedom.

Reginald intended taking her to Egypt, a voyage up the Nile having always been one of his "dreams."

"Fancy," wrote Leila, "Rose at Wadi Halfa! enduring the miseries of those Nile boats for the sake of reaching the 'second cataract,' and then not knowing what she went to see! Can you fancy the little fussy thing in all the horrors of such an expedition—with uncurled hair, and sunburnt complexion! terrified at the sight of half-naked Arabs, and grease-besmeared women!—concluding it to be 'all very romantic,' but wishing it was a little more comfortable. Poor little Rose! yet who would not envy her?"

I did, I know; and that mysterious Egypt,

with its lordly river—its pyramids—its temples—and all its grand old memories, haunted my dreams eternally.

Leila informed me, however, that Captain Hawkes had proposed to Evelyn, and had been accepted, (at this, I felt a strange foreboding), “do you not wonder,” she added, “how he ever found courage to come to the point?”

Another piece of information, Leila’s letter contained, was, that Mr. St. Leger was going to stand for Haverton, “which, however,” she said, “I suppose you know, as Haverton is in your immediate neighbourhood, and the D’Arville interest must be important; no doubt he will be wanting Miss Brand to canvass for him—and you will not, Isola, be so cruel to refuse.”

“And what of Charles Compton?” I thought.

A postscript informed me that he was working away prodigiously at Oxford, and was expected to distinguish himself greatly.

What a sunbeam this letter was to me! how I read it, and re-read it—sunning myself as it were in its warm spirit, till the great

palatial apartments which I had thought so uncomfortable looking, seemed bright and splendid as those in an Arabian dream, and those odious women, Dashington and set, were mere butterflies, airily skimming through the garden of life, and wisely sipping such sweets, as the flowers on their pathway offered.

I felt so merry, as quite to excite their curiosity I am sure, by the look my gladness reflected on my face, yet, what was it after all ?

I could not have told, had I been asked, only that a bright being whom I had lately met, had remembered me, and sent a gleam of her own heart's light to cheer mine.

One reason might have been that this letter presented a spice of *nature* for my contemplation, which was refreshing in the artificial atmosphere I breathed amongst people who dared not laugh, nor cry, but simpered and smiled instead ; whose ideas were all stale, and whose limited capabilities precluded their imbibing fresh ones. It was satisfactory, however, to see that they were utterly unconscious of any deficiency in their mental organization, and

regarded with contempt any one who possessed higher qualifications than themselves.

In a short time, we heard a great deal about the Haverton election, and in our drives met with huge placards at every corner, which arrested our attention by their flaming colour, and the immense size of the capital letters.

“Vote for Fitz Booby”—and “St. Leger for ever!” met us at every turn of the road.

The interest of the Castle party seemed with Fitz Booby, who was an Honourable Booby, and whose father besides being a Booby, was an old baby, as I myself heard his hopeful son aver.

“Pon my life,” he said, “the governaw is a wegulaw old baby—pity he cawn’t be put out to nurse—a—there ought to be an establishment of the kind—for a supa-annuwated pawents—gweat comfort to society! he wants to persuade me—would you believe it? to vote for Fwee twade! Hang it—no—a Fitz Booby’s not come to that yet,” and he twirled his flaxen moustaches, and surveyed himself in a full length mirror.

“And the other candidate—Mr. St. Leger?” said a little girl just come out, to



Mrs. Dashington, "do you know him at all?"

"St. Leger?" answered that lady dreamily, "yes, I fancy I know him; O, of course I do, a very elegant creature he is—in a *deux-temps* he is delightful."

"I believe he's coming here, but don't, dearest, give him your heart, he would never give you his in return."

"Indeed!" cried the young fledgling in surprise. "Is he so cold-hearted, yet so charming? how very sad!"

"No, *chère petite*, he is not cold-hearted, poor St. Leger; but a little puss like you, cannot have sufficient experience to win a heart which has withstood so many sieges as his; you are sure to fail if you try, and then you know, love, you will get laughed at."

"But, Mrs. Dashington," pursued her young friend, "I should not *try* to win him, that sort of thing—love, I mean, ought to come naturally, should it not?"

"*Pauvre enfant!*" was the exclamation of the full blown dame.

"How refreshingly innocent!" cried the others. The "fledgling" as I was wont to call

her, was the only person amongst the assemblage of visitors, with whom I cared to associate, for though she was a poor, insipid little thing, the neglected child of a vain, silly mother, and her innocence was half stupidity, I felt pity for her, and some interest in her fate.

Mrs. Dashington's advice, had, of course, the effect contrary to that intended ; but this I need hardly add, it might be so readily assumed.

It was with a feeling of pleasure, much greater, I am sure, than the occasion warranted, that I shook hands with Mr. St. Leger when we met the following week.

I was feeling so lonely, and his presence brought such pleasing reminiscences of Compton, that the sight of him was really most welcome. I never thought of disguising my feelings, as I ought to have done ; I did not recollect how exceedingly improper it is for a young lady to express pleasure at the sight of a gentleman, and as he met me with an appearance of great cordiality, the warmth of my own manner did not strike me ; it did others though, and was, of course, commented upon.

His visit to the Castle did not avail him much, so far as his political interests were concerned.

Lord D'Arville was a strong Conservative when "brought to the point," though he affected an indifference on the subject on ordinary occasions, and interfered as little as possible in politics. In the present instance, however, it was most gratifying to him to feel his importance, and to know that his influence could decide the question—he gave it to the Tory interest, and Fitz Booby was his man. The tenantry on the D'Arville estates were easily persuaded to become "Boobyites," so that St. Leger with his liberal opinions, stood no chance of assistance from Lord D'Arville.

In the town of Haverton, however, (where, by the way, at the "Red Lion," and not at the "D'Arville Arms," he was staying), he had many supporters, and on hearing the state of the poll, one day, I thought he would triumph; indeed, it seemed certain that he would.

His speeches were sensible, manly, and thoroughly English, delivered in an easy, gentlemanlike, straightforward manner, with-

out the least affectation, and the populace cheered him warmly.

Fitz Booby, on the contrary, though a few in the crowd, (trumpeters hired for the occasion no doubt), made a noisy demonstration in his favour, was hissed violently whenever he attempted to speak, and either from nervousness, or incapacity, broke down dreadfully.

Just under the balcony from whence we were watching the proceedings, stood a man in the dress of a mechanic.

"Listen!" he exclaimed to a friend, "the chap can't speak English, with his 'iths,' and his 'aw's.'"

"My fwends," the speaker was saying, "I think it nethethary to tell you that I am an Englithman—"

"Be ye quite sure?" cried a voice in the crowd.

"Dethended from an old family, lords of the thoil for genewations and genewations; and I claim your votes by wight of the supewiowity which distinguishes every membaw of my illustwious family. We hold pothithons of twust in ewewy bwanch of the administwation—the house of Fith Booby is well known,

gentlemen, and when I tell you that I am a Fith Booby, and dethended from a long line of Fith Boobys—illustrious Fith Boobys, gentlemen, I am sure you will do your duty—to—a—yourselves, gentlemen, and to—a—me—a—it is uthleth for me to address you further.”

“Quite right, measter,” cried a labourer in a smock-frock, “unless thee can make I understand thee, thee’d better come down—I ain’t a-going to send thee to Parliament to talk that there gibberish: what good’s thee learning done thee, I’d like to know? Whoy, my son, Oliver, (turning to those around him), my son Oliver, as is just come from grammar school, ’e lick he into fits any day, in his talk, that ’e ’ood.”

“St. Leger for ever!—hip, hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah!” rent the air again and again, and a show of hands told in favour of the Liberal candidate.

I went back to the Castle with the full conviction that Mr. St. Leger would win the day, and awaited with deep interest—amounting almost to anxiety—the close of the poll.

At length came the news—what a dis-

appointment ! Fitz Booby was returned : my favourite had lost !

How it was managed I never knew ; the demonstration in the town was, to all appearance, so entirely in his favour, as to mislead one completely ; but there was a great fuss made about it afterwards, something was said about trying to unseat Fitz Booby—hints were pretty loudly whispered about “corruption,” and a “rotten borough,” and some of the newspapers—those Radical papers, as I heard them called, expressed themselves very strongly on the subject.

Mr. St. Leger bore his defeat with great equanimity, or, appeared to do so, his habitual *sang froid* never forsaking him ; and received Lord D’Arville’s commonplace expressions of regret at having been obliged to appear in antagonism to a friend, with great good nature, and accepted an invitation to the Castle for that very day.

I need not say how profuse I was in my “condolences,” for such might almost be called the style in which I addressed the unsuccessful candidate, or the warm language I used to testify my regret at the return of the Honourable Fitz Booby.

It was said within hearing of my guardian, who turned round, and sternly rebuked me for my freedom of tongue.

"Whatever may be your feelings, Miss Brand," he said, "I must beg you will keep them under control—such bursts of enthusiasm are most unmannerly, and unladylike; as to *opinions*—a girl like you can't have any."

I thought I had, and was going to tell him so, but he had turned to Mrs. Dashington, and was saying aloud:

"I wish, my dear madam, you could give Miss Brand some of your charming nonchalance of manner; she goes off like a Congreve rocket, and quite frightens any one who is at all nervous. I trust she will be able in time to get rid of this vulgar enthusiasm, and acquire something of your composed manner."

Mrs. Dashington closed her angelic eyes—a favourite habit of hers—and sighed softly, as if even thought was an effort.

"But, my dear lord," she said, "you cannot expect everything at once. Cultivation will do a great deal, and we will hope our dear girl will do everything you wish in a little while."

(" Our dear girl !")

" She will, if she will only take a lesson from you," said my guardian. " You do not know," he continued, to me, " what a great advantage you possess, in being favoured with the society of so perfect a specimen of bon ton as Mrs. Dashington, and I hope it will not be lost upon you."

I saw a roguish twinkle in the corner of Mr. St. Leger's eye ; he had a fancy for drooping one lid occasionally, in a manner peculiar to himself, which stood him instead of a smile, and I could scarcely refrain from joining audibly in his quiet mirth.

" Funny people, you all are !" I thought.



## CHAPTER XIV.

"What say you? can you love the  
"Gentleman?"

ROMEO AND JULIET.

"Scorn no man's love, though of a mean degree  
(Love is a present for a mightie king.)  
Much lesse make any one thineemie."

GEORGE HERBERT.

It was really very pleasant to have the society of Mr. St. Leger once more, and without any effort on his part, he became a great favourite with the other ladies, so much so, that I was rather amused at finding that they did not quite like his being so often at my side.

On making this discovery, I felt a somewhat mischievous pleasure in keeping him near

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me, and many were the little pleasantries in which we indulged at the expense of our artificial companions.

Where was Mr. Grey's warning then? in thus giving the rein to my satirical propensity, had I forgotten him and his friendly hint!

No, but Mr. St. Leger had such a clever way of shewing things off in a ridiculous light, it was next to impossible to help imbibing some of his spirit, whilst hearing his caustic remarks, and watching the immobility of his countenance under the greatest provocatives to mirth.

Thus I found his society exceedingly amusing and agreeable, and a few days passed very pleasantly, till the morning arrived which he had fixed for his departure.

I then received a summons from my guardian to attend him in his morning-room.

With some trepidation I went, wondering much why he wished to see me. Lord D'Arville was standing with his back to the fire, looking very much pleased, and as I entered, he accosted me in a manner unusually kind.

"Well, Isola," he said, "you're a wiser young lady than I took you to be."

I must have looked surprised, for he went on.

"Yes! you need not pretend such innocence. You know perfectly well why you have been summoned here."

"Indeed—" I began.

"Pooh—pooh—well, never mind, I dare say it will not surprise you very much to hear that St. Leger has proposed for you, and a devilish lucky girl you are too," he added.

I was perfectly stupified with amazement.

"Mr. St. Leger?" I stammered at length.

"Yes—is it so astonishing then, when you've been trying so hard to get him?"

"Nothing of the kind, Sir. No one—"

"Come, Isola, that won't do, we'll say nothing about your diplomacy, but here's the fact; your bird is limed, and I congratulate you."

For some minutes I seemed not to have breath to speak; between shame, confusion and anger, I was bewildered.

"There is some mistake," I said, at last.

"How so?" asked my guardian, "there is none in the fact of his having proposed to you through me, and you have only to give

your answer. Clear mode of proceeding enough."

I leaned against a chair, and endeavoured to compose myself, but was silent for some time.

"Well," said his lordship, "you're a long time giving me your instructions; but as your answer will of course be in the affirmative, perhaps I had better let you settle the matter with St. Leger yourself."

"My answer will *not* be in the affirmative," I cried with an effort.

"What? What is this?" exclaimed my guardian in an angry tone. "You don't mean to tell me that you would be such a fool—such an arrant fool, as to refuse a man like St. Leger? A man whom half the girls in London are dying to have—unexceptionable in every respect—but you must be feigning."

"Indeed, I am not. I mean what I say, that I do not wish to marry Mr. St. Leger."

"Wish—of course not—highly improper if you did. It is quite sufficient for you to give your consent in a ladylike, composed manner, if you *can* do such a thing. No wishing is required in the matter."

I was fairly aghast.

"Well," he continued, "what else have you to say?"

"This, Lord d'Arville, that I shall not marry Mr. St. Leger."

"Oh! oh! it's come to that is it?" said my guardian with a slight laugh, "and pray, Mademoiselle, on what grounds do you refuse so eligible an offer?"

"Simply, my lord, because I do not like Mr. St. Leger sufficiently for a husband."

"Ah! you have been studying the subject of matrimony, have you? and the degree of liking necessary for entering that holy state with—well, what next?"

"Why, I think it would be very wrong to marry anyone I did not—not like very much."

"A very pretty 'young lady's' reason, but I beg to inform you that I'm the best judge of what's good for you."

"I do not think your lordship can be, in this case."

"You're very self-sufficient, Miss Brand, but I will tell you what, you're downright mad and obstinate, and you shall repent

this," and he accompanied the threat with a look which was meant to intimidate.

I turned to leave the room, but he bade me stop, saying :

"Stay, stay, young lady, I've not done with you yet. I wish to know what business you had, in such a state of feeling, to give encouragement to a gentleman, in the way in which you have been encouraging Mr. St. Leger?"

Now flashed across my mind the recollection of my manner to him ! how calculated it had been to mislead ! A hot blush overspread my face ; I felt angry with myself, and was silent. My tormentor triumphed, and proceeded.

"Your encouragement of his addresses has been the remark of everyone, you cannot pretend you did not understand what he meant by his attentions ; or if you do, I don't believe you ; and if this is to be your course of conduct, I am afraid I shall have some trouble with you."

I felt that I had done wrong, or rather, had been excessively stupid, so bore the rebuke in silence, and after a few moments spent by my guardian in tilting himself backwards and forwards on his heel, he said,

"I don't wish to detain you here any longer, you may withdraw ; I am afraid I shall find you a most troublesome charge ; but, perhaps, what I have said may be a lesson to you in matters of this kind for the future."

\* \* \* \*

A few minutes afterwards I found myself in the library with Mr. St. Leger.

I had gone there on leaving my guardian, and sat agitated by worrying thought, when he entered unconscious of my presence ; of course, there was no retreating, but he saw at a glance my perturbed appearance, and no doubt guessed the cause, for coming towards me, he was about to speak, when I cried impetuously.

"Oh, Mr. St. Leger ! how could you be so unkind—so very unkind !"

"My dear Miss Brand," he answered quietly, "I am not aware of having acted unkindly towards you ; believe me I had no intention of doing so."

"No, no, but you know what I mean," I said, much confused.

"Indeed, I am truly grieved, if your present distress has been caused through me,

I assure you it was through a mistaken impression ; but I stand rebuked. I have been too presumptuous."

"No, no," I exclaimed, "it is my fault, I have been sadly to blame for misleading you so. I see it all now—I never thought. Oh ! you must forgive me," I cried, "I am very, very sorry—" and I was fairly sobbing.

Mr. St. Leger must have been annoyed ; any man would, but with that admirable tact which he possessed in an eminent degree, he concealed his annoyance, when he saw my distress.

"I am indeed grieved," he said kindly, "that my selfish feelings, in blinding me to the state of your sentiments, have occasioned you this trouble ; but will you not permit me to plead my own cause ?"

"No, you must spare me the pain I shall feel, in saying anything which you might construe as unkind."

"Well, then, if it must be so, and you are so hardhearted Miss Brand, I can only hope that my transgression may be forgiven, and that we may still be friends."

"O, yes !" I exclaimed eagerly, "I do



earnestly hope so ; you must not quarrel with me ; we can be warm friends still."

We did remain such, and so ended my first adventure of that sort.

One by one, each guest departed, and good luck I wished them.

Miss Fitz Booby, the successful "scandicate's" sister, had been eternally squalling, and thundering on the piano, till her presence was quite a nuisance ; and another woman, a little, thin, emaciated creature, seemed capable of nothing else but yelling with a very harsh, cracked voice, every new opera aria. She had a family of seven small children at home, as I understood, and it struck me that she had better have been singing lullabies to them, than exhibiting her faded charms and worthless accomplishments at D'Arville Castle.

The poor little "fledgling," I pitied, as I saw her carried off by her absurd mother ; as she was a girl, who, in good hands, would have made a better specimen of her sex. She was an affectionate, warm-hearted little thing, with a purity of mind which was astonishing, considering her education ; for when a girl is

brought up from the cradle without hearing of anything but the vanities, follies, and absurdities so highly esteemed in a certain set of fashionable life, what can you expect ?

Her mother was a headless, heartless puppet, going through the dance of life mechanically—folly pulling the strings ; who would not pity the ill-starred daughter of such a parent ?

Mrs. Dashington, who would have died of *ennui*, I am sure, had she stayed a day longer, dragged off her unresisting spouse the last. They were bound for the paternal seat, in Scotland. "A dreadful undertaking," as she said, "Christmas is an odious time, requiring this effort every year, but the poor old Earl says he never could spend it without me, and Fred is a great pet with his father, but I feel the more annoyed at having to go, as the keen air of the North does not suit darling Mignon."

Mignon, was her stuffy, wheezing, wretched little dog.

As the last carriage load drove off, I felt very much inclined to sing "Jubilate," to throw up all the windows to let out the vile essences,

and *esprits*, which had so long poisoned the air of the apartments ; and with that act, I would willingly have let out the recollection of all the human donkeys, who had there been exhibiting their asinine peculiarities, so absurdly.

Lady Bernard was expected in the course of the day, having kindly condescended to spend the Christmas with her nephew ; I presume, for the purpose of giving him her advice respecting his troublesome ward—myself.

My guardian and I sat down to luncheon by ourselves, and it was the first time we had ever been so circumstanced.

He looked more amiable than his wont, which I attributed to the *côtelettes* being tenderer than usual ; but the cause was to be found in the departure of his guests, who were beginning to bore him, and partly in a new feeling, or what in him stood for feeling, awakened under the left pocket of his waistcoat.

He spoke in a gentle tone to me, and after his second glass of Rudesheimer, he began,

“Now, Isola, I want you to explain the mystery of your refusal of poor St. Leger.”

The question took me greatly by surprise ; I had hoped to hear no more on the subject, and I told him as much.

"Nonsense—come now, don't be a silly girl—you can surely trust your old guardian, can't you?" this was said in a tone which implied, that he considered himself anything but old.

I laughed, and looked foolish, I am sure.

"Come," he went on, as he drew his chair nearer to me, "make me your father confessor, and tell me how it was that a young thing like you, could refuse such a good offer?"

"Good offer!" I exclaimed, "I do not see anything so very grand in it—only a baronet."

"Oh! that's it, is it? We're ambitious."

"No," I said.

"What is it, then?"

"I don't know any other reason than the one I gave your lordship—that I did not like him well enough."

"But they tell me—I must own, I did not notice it myself, but they tell me you encouraged his addresses."

"I did not mean to do so, it was unintentionally, if I did," I replied.

"That's a good girl—but Isola," and he took my hand, "is there no one you have seen, whom you would like to marry?"

I blushed to the tips of my fingers, at such a strange question, and stammered out, "no."

He still held my hand, and would have detained me, but burning with blushes under his fixed gaze, I became quite angry, and wresting my hand from his grasp, rushed out of the room, while he laughed a deep, monotonous toned laugh.

Just outside the door, stood my maid—Beever.

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The relation between my guardian and myself was of a most disagreeable nature: to dislike and contempt on my side, was now added positive repugnance, and some little fear, an undefinable feeling which inclined me to avoid him more and more—never to remain a moment alone with him—never to allow his eye to meet mine, nor my hand to rest an instant in his; and I ardently longed for the time to come which would witness his departure, and

my release from the restraint imposed upon me by his society. Lady Bernard arrived on the day, and at the exact hour she was expected ; and her step became more martial, and her visage more Romanized as she took in hand the reins of government at her nephew's lordly home.

Of course as might have been expected, Christmas at D'Arville Castle, was a dreary affair enough : in-doors, there was nothing to speak of that happy season. Lady Bernard looked starch and stiff, as if she had been washed up, and ironed out fresh for the occasion, Lord D'Arville looked "bored" and said "it was a time he hated—always reminded him of bills ;" and for myself, it being my first Christmas in England, and my imagination having pictured "merry Christmas" in England as something very charming—disappointment was my portion.

There was no family party, no cheerful blaze crackling, round which young faces clustered—all was dull, unmitigated gloom.

The sun vouchsafed us but a few pale beams, just sufficient to enable the tall dark fir trees to cast their blue shadows on the Castle wall, and to reflect their long heavy limbs in the glassy

waters that lay pooled beneath them: black pools they were, which I used to shudder at.

The shining leaved holly was there, with its bright red berry, and the servants decked their rooms so prettily with it, that attracted by the gay appearance of the windows of a room on the ground floor one day, I spoke to a respectable old lady I saw standing there, and asked permission to look in.

She proved to be the housekeeper, and she asked me to step into the room, which was her own apartment, and see the arrangement.

Very pretty and comfortable it looked, that snuggerly, adorned with those glossy leaves, and brilliant scarlet berries.

Mrs. Bounce, (for such it seemed was her name) was a comely, plump body, with a good-humoured, sleek, rosy face, and a sunny smile, which convinced you that the air of importance she carried with her, was not the result of natural conceit, but only assumed as a necessary qualification for her dignified position.

"Miss Grand, I'sume—won't 'e set 'e down? Very glad to see 'e Miss."

I accepted her offer; her kindly looks pleased me so much, and the room had such a snug,

cozy look with it, I was quite delighted at having found it out.

In the windows stood pots of geraniums, verbena, and myrtle; a lively canary hung in a bright brass cage above, pouring forth its song in loud thrilling tones; and the walls were graced with a number of portraits, some in faded water colour, others in black profile—queer, stiff-looking things all, but as my eye glanced over them, she said with a sigh:

“Ah! them be my poor children as died—the beautifullest creturs they was! this one with the blue dress and pink ribbins, was my Jenny, she died of information on the chest; and t’other, he as stands looking so noble and so proud, was my son Richard—such a fellar! his chest was a pictur, so broad, and his whiskers! my! they was lovely! Ah!” and again she sighed, and twinkled her eyes.

I ventured to ask her if she had been long in the D’Arville service, something making me fancy that she had not, and she replied,

“Why no—I was a girl an’ lived a few months with the old Lord and Lady D’Arville. Ah! them was the folks for looks—the finest couple in all Warwickshire, so portalent, and



majesty-like ! and she was a gentle 'mesticated body, not pompious in nothink but 'pearance : but my lord was a scornful, sniffing, mighty grand man, always a making faces as if the air he breathed wasn't good enough for him, and smelt physicky like, and he never descended in his manners, but was a stuck up, blown out sort of gentleman. Well, I lived here till I married Dick the second gardener, and how it comed about, I was walking in the garden one day—young man comes up.

" 'What's your name ?' ses he, 'you be a comely lass.'

" 'Vilet,' ses I.

" 'Vilet,' ses he, 'is that it ? 'tis a pretty, modest, sweet flower—just like yourself, Miss—I likes vilets,' ses he.

" And every day after, brings me a nosegay reg'lar : well, we was married, and went to another part of the country to live—a young fam'ly came, but one by one, as they grow'd up they died of summut or other. Jenny, of information, two others of some outlandish named thing, and at last my poor husband died too." She wiped the tears from her eyes and presently went on.

"I com'd back to the old parts, 'tis so rulah and pretty here, an' hearing say as how the lord was wanting a housekeeper, I implied for the capacity. Ses he 'Madam, your portalent carriag<sup>e</sup> will do credit to my establishment,'—his very words, Miss—so I com'd here at Michaelmas."

"And do you find yourself comfortable?"

"Well," she answered, drawing up her little nose, "pooty well, but the goins on here beant quite to my liking—all these new fangled ways, suffuses me sometimes, and these mestics is so imperent, they gets up dances now, and goes a scorting up the carpets till I'm amost smothered with the dust; and then the purvidence is so 'stensive that I'm pretty well aggravated sometime; but there, out of kindness to my lord, from being acquainted so to speak with his parents, I've com'd here, not studying my own conveniency."

I liked the old lady so much, that my visits to her apartment were frequently repeated, and we became capital friends.

I was sure of a kind welcome, whenever I visited the "snuggery," as I called it, and her

warm affectionate manners, and cool philosophizing discourse, were really of service to me, aiding to balance the want of sympathy in the gilded saloon above stairs, and the tenderer sentiments of a heart, which then, was unacquainted with philosophy.

## CHAPTER XV.

“Da fing mein Leben an, als ich dich liebe!”

GÖTTE, *Iphigenia*.

“Denkt ihr an mich ein Augenblickchen nur,

Ich werde Zeit genug an euch zu denken haben.”

FAUST.

OH ! the dreary winter ! when the moaning wind went breathing its lamentations round every turret and dome of the gloomy Castle, whistling among the withered branches of the melancholy trees, and sighing over the face of the waters : and when the snow came down—steadily, steadily, day after day, till the whole country was wrapped in its winding-sheet.

When frosty days—and rainy days, ice and slush, succeeded each other alternately, how oppressed with miserable fancies was poor Isola !

Lord D'Arville devoted his time to learning the concertina; Lady Bernard knitted from morning till night; whilst I read and yawned, painted and sighed, practised and fretted in solitude.

Nothing else? yes, thoughts of the past came flooding my spirit, bringing visions that saddened me sometimes, and at others sent a thrill through my very soul; and I felt my temples burning with a fiery blush—was it at the thought of Mr. St. Leger? recollections of that gentleman scarcely ever passed through my mind. No, one memory alone seemed to live there, round it thoughts and feelings clustered most strangely, as if my spirit's life had been dated from that one point; all other memories appeared sunk in the abyss of forgetfulness, I felt that I had lived—really lived, only since I had known—Mr. Grey!

How I thought about him! how I took in review every scene in which he had played a part! how I remembered and treasured up his words—his very looks, till imagination attained such a power, that in the grey twilight, or the uncertain gleam of the flickering fire, I could almost fancy he was at my side, his spirit-eyes

looking into mine: and a feeling of joy so deep, so unutterable would awake within me, that external circumstances were unnoticed, and for awhile, I dwelt in the land of dreams—sweet and heavenly dreams. Why did I wake from them! wake to mourn his absence, far, far away, and to chide myself for my unmaidenly interest in one who was nothing to me, and for my weak self-indulgence in cherishing such recollections. Yet why not think of him?

I did not know, it was only a natural feeling of pride I believe, and in my isolated position, removed from congenial society and young sympathies, the thoughts of that one friend who seemed by some mysterious power to know my heart better than any other being on earth, were so welcome and so sweet, that insensibly they throned themselves within me—and cast them out, I could not.

Fortunately, however, for the tone of my mind, which in time might have become sicklied by constantly dwelling on this subject, a new source of amusement, and that of an active kind, presented itself.

Since the scene at luncheon, on the day the

last guests departed, my guardian seemed bent on making himself as agreeable to me as possible.

“Mind, Isola,” he would say, “that you have everything you want, and if you are not comfortable, tell me.”

And finding me evince a taste for horse exercise, he presented me with a most beautiful black Arabian—one of the most beautiful I ever saw of that fine breed.

Hassan was raven black; his glossy coat was like satin; and I loved the pride of his arched neck, and the fire of his bright eye: there was pride too, in his step, for he was a “high stepper;” and though full of life and playful spirit, his temper was most amiable—beautiful Hassan!

My guardian himself mounted me for my first ride, and said: “The horse and its rider were admirably matched,” and with more patience than I thought he possessed, gave me my first lesson.

How I enjoyed my rides! Over heath and hill—far, far away. Across the country for miles and miles I would go, feeling like a winged creature cleaving the regions of air. No

longer of the earth—earthy, but like some spirit thing skimming through the clouds; yet in my material nature, revelling in my deep sense of enjoyment, drinking in the heathery breezes as from a cool silver chalice—steeping my senses in its intoxicating sweetness, and exhilarated with the draught—bounding on—ever on towards the distant horizon :—anywhere with me—anywhere—brave, beautiful Hassan !

I think I would have lived in the saddle, if I could, but Lord D'Arville did not share my passion, and I was obliged to cultivate the acquaintance of the wife of a neighbouring squire, for the sake of her chaperonage on occasions when my guardian felt “shaky;” or for other reasons was not disposed to accompany me.

My groom was a well conducted respectable young man, who had been engaged at a ladies' riding-school, and my random riding quite horrified him. Sometimes he would ride up to within a yard or two, and touching his hat respectfully would say, with horror painted on his countenance.

“ Beg pardon, Miss, but if you'll *please*



rein in your 'os a little, or 'e'l be off straight away; not so much, Miss; you must give him 'is 'ed—a *leetle* more—thank you, Miss."

At another time, he would gallop up in a terrible fright.

"Miss," he would cry out, "I can't go for to see you break your neck afore my very heyes, and you *will* be hoff if you don't sit steadier. 'Eel well down, Miss, right helbow hin—that's it."

"Indeed, my dear Miss Brand," Mrs. Townsend, the squire's wife aforesaid would say, "the man is quite right; in your admiration of the views, and enjoyment of the exercise, you will be off some day."

A few rides, however, perfected me in the equestrian art, and I rode to the satisfaction of everybody, save and except in the predilection I had for "riding like the Wild Huntsman," as my guardian called it. As to poor Murray he was delighted, and thought I owed all my improvement to his tuition.

"Excuse the liberty, Miss, of my speaking," he said one day, "but I will say there ain't a gentleman in the land as knows how a lady ought to ride better than Jim Murray,

and I want you, Miss, to be the fust rider in Warwickshire."

Murray certainly took a pride both in his young mistress and her horse, and bore very well with all my capricious fancies for riding at all hours, and in the most break-neck places. What pleasure I gained by the exercise, and in the varied scenes in hill and dale, I witnessed, none can tell, but those who think with me, and feel as I did then.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Touch her not scornfully ;  
Think of her mournfully,  
Gently and humanly ;  
Not of the stains of her,  
All that remains of her  
Now is pure womanly.

"Make no deep scrutiny  
Into her mutiny  
Rash and undutiful :  
Past all dishonour,  
Death has left on her  
Only the beautiful."

HOOD.

ONE day in returning from a ride, I saw Mrs. Townsend home, (her residence lying on the road back to the Castle), and had not gone very far homewards, when from Hassan's limping step, I discovered that he had hurt his foot.

Wishing it to be immediately looked to, I drew up for a moment at a little wayside inn, and while Murray and the ostler were attending to my favourite, my notice was attracted by a conversation going on between the landlady and a gentleman of quiet, medical aspect, who was standing with her at the door.

“Poor thing!” Dame Boniface was saying, “’tis very sad, very indeed; and you really think she will die?”

“I fear so—great prostration of strength you see; and the pressure on the brain—bad case—bad case. Don’t know what to say it.”

“Dear—dear—mercy ’pon me!—and what’s to be done? not knowing nothing about her, and nobody but that heathenish sort of woman with her!”

“Awkward case, Ma-am, very,” said the little Medico. “I’ll look in again by and bye, but must be off now—good morning!”

The foregoing dialogue interested me so much, that addressing the landlady, I made some inquiries about the dying stranger, and the answer I received, induced me to alight and enter the inn.

“The poor thing’s been lying in a sort of

stupor like," I was informed, "but maybe you'd like to see the lady and her maid from furrin parts, as being a young lady, 'tis very likes you'd know her tongue," observed the landlady in not very grammatical English.

Assenting to the suggestion, I was conducted by her to the room occupied by the unfortunate stranger.

The house was one of those in and out, up and down old fashioned places, which are rarely met with now, save in out of the way regions.

A fire had been lighted in the room, "to make the poor body comfortable," as the landlady said, and such an event not having occurred perhaps for years, the warmth had drawn out the mouldy smell from the damp walls and dirty hangings, and made the atmosphere dreadfully oppressive; reeking odours of stale tobacco from the neighbouring tap-room, and others still worse from stables underneath, added to the discomfort of the place.

The ceiling was very low, with beams across it, and the furniture was scanty, common and worm-eaten.

Here—

“In the worst inn’s worst room,”

on the deal tent bedstead with its dingy, tattered red curtains, lay a woman, moaning gently.

I approached quietly, but the entrance of the two visitors had been noticed by another woman, who was sitting on the bed watching the patient. She turned an inquiring glance on us from her large, flashing black eyes, which possessed all the beauty Italy accords to the eyes of her fiery children, and seeing, I suppose, something of sympathy in my face, she sighed as she pointed to the poor invalid, and murmured—“ Ah ! Signora !”

I now addressed her in Italian, and endeavoured to glean something from her, concerning herself and her unhappy companion, who I discovered, was her mistress ; and delighted at hearing her mother-tongue in a strange land, she was proceeding with great vivacity to tell her tale, when another moan—so sad—so heart-breaking burst from the dying woman, that I hastened to her side—raised her in my arms, and removing the curtain a

little to give her air, looked anxiously at her face. I started—and for a moment relaxed my hold, I seemed frozen with horror, but suddenly a cry burst from the wasted lips—“Giuseppe!” I raised the head gently—“Giuseppe!” again, in fainter tones, and a stream of blood was pouring from her mouth, upon my bosom.

In another moment, my arms supported a corpse—the corpse of the once Lady D’Arville!

\* \* \* \*

Inexpressibly shocked, and not knowing how to act, I could only promise that I would send assistance to the landlady, who kept lifting up her hands, and crying for “mercy.” I also spoke kindly to the poor Italian, and endeavoured to calm her excitement; but on discovering that all was over, she burst out into a wild, passionate fit of lamentation, and hastily lighting a number of candles, after the custom of the Milanese, she rushed scared from the presence of the dead.

\* \* \* \*

“Good God! Isola! what is the matter?”

was the exclamation of my guardian, as he received me at the Castle entrance.

“What has happened?”

It was the gory stain had attracted him, which in my excitement I had forgotten.

I was feeling faint and ill, and after lifting me from my horse, with real alarm in his looks, he repeated the question.

“What is it? Murray, what has happened?”

“Nothing as I know on, my lord,” replied the groom.

Ascending the steps, I turned to Lord D’Arville. “It is your wife’s blood,” I said, “she died in my arms just now.”

I never shall forget his face at that moment, the horror depicted there! the wild look—quickly followed by one of incredulity.

“What are you talking about? are you mad?” he asked at length.

“No, perfectly sane,” I answered, “and something must be done. Murray will tell you the name of the inn we stopped at just now; where you will find the—the corpse.”

He turned pale at the word, but his countenance still bore an incredulous expression.



"You must be dreaming," he began. I pointed to the crimson stain.

"What does it all mean? explain yourself," he exclaimed with some impatience, and then listened with breathless attention while I recounted to him my painful adventure; when I concluded, he was silent for some minutes, during which, I wondered much, what he would say next.

When he spoke again it was in his usual tone.

"Very mysterious and strange indeed," he said, "can't make it out at all; you're sure you're not mistaken in the person?"

I shook my head.

"Well!" he exclaimed at length, "after all, I don't see what I have to do with it, it's nothing to me," and he began tapping his boot with his cane.

"I suppose your lordship would not like the occurrence recorded in the newspapers," I ventured to say.

He turned suddenly.

"No doubt," I continued, "the Italian servant could tell you why her mistress was so near D'Arville Castle, or there may be letters or papers—"

"Ah! true, never thought of that; yes, and there's a servant you say?"

"A woman."

"And what explanation does she give?"

"You had better question her, yourself," I answered. "I have mentioned no names," I added, seeing that he hesitated.

This seemed to decide him, for after saying hurriedly. "Right, quite right," he ordered the groom's horse to be brought back, and mounting it immediately, went off unattended to the place Murray described.

"Alas! for the rarity  
Of Christian charity  
Under the sun!"

Lady Bernard was much shocked, when she heard the recital, not at the circumstances of the case, but at my so imprudently rushing into a scene of the kind.

"A highly improper thing for you to do at any time, Isola; how did you know what infectious disease you might have taken, going into such a place? and the idea of its having brought you into contact with that person, that depraved creature, quite disgusts me." Such were the observations she made.

•

It was in vain that I pleaded the cause of humanity, urged the obligation of duty, and spoke gently of the unfortunate, though sinful woman, it only seemed to incense the austere lady the more.

"What!" she exclaimed, "you would really defend a vile character like that? I am ashamed of you, Miss Brand, and must request that I hear no more such remarks from you, it is most unbecoming! what would my nephew, your guardian say, were these extraordinary remarks to reach his ears?"

I found it was useless pleading with her, so was fain to lock my reflections in my bosom; but the scene had impressed me so painfully, that the excitement it occasioned, combined with a slight cold, produced feverish symptoms, and I was obliged to keep my room.

This was rather satisfactory than otherwise, as it spared me the company of my guardian, which I quite dreaded. I hardly knew why, but I was becoming painfully averse to his society.

In answer to some questions I ventured to put, a few days afterwards, to Lady Bernard, she told me that "the person's" remains had

been buried quietly, and that the Italian servant had been sent back at Lord D'Arville's expense to Italy.

It seemed from the account of this faithful servant, that the man, for whom Lady D'Arville had sacrificed all a woman holds dear, had at length forsaken her, and with a heart wrung with remorse, and broken by sorrow, and a frame so worn by suffering, that it could scarcely retain its immortal tenant, her earnest desire had been to see once more the husband of her youth ; on her knees to implore his forgiveness, and with that vouchsafed to her—to die !

The fulfilment of this desire, was not vouchsafed to her, though her weary journey was almost ended, and she was within so short a distance of him, she so ardently wished to see.

I could scarcely regret it, pondering on the matter. The thought crossed me, "suppose she had seen him, had been able to cast herself like a poor Magdalene at his feet, and with sobs and tears from her bleeding heart's fountain, had sued for pardon, for only one word ere she laid down in death ; and that he, that hard flinty man had sneered at her in

her deep penitence, had not vouchsafed her his forgiveness, but had spurned her from him as she lay there, and crushed her stricken heart still further !”

It almost made me rejoice, while thinking thus, that *my* arms had sustained her in her last agony, that I had closed her dying eyes, and that her life-blood had been poured forth on one, who, while shrinking from her sin, could yet in love, pray for her as a sinner, and shed a tear of pity for her dark, bitter fate. Who could tell the struggles which had been hers ? the dire temptation which had presented itself day by day, when, unloved and desolate, she had in her weakness sighed for sympathy, for kindness, affection. The world forms its judgment, it sides with the stronger one ; and woman, weak woman, once fallen, lost to purity, not cloaking, but revealing her fault—hard is her fate !

During the whole of the month of February, I was confined to my chamber by a severe fit of illness ; it was very lonely at times, as hour after hour sped on its way and no sounds reached me in my room, save the distant bay of the bloodhound, or the melancholy cawing

of the rooks in the neighbouring wood, varied sometimes by the fall of swilling rain, the sharp rap of hailstones, or the softer tapping of sleet upon my windows.

Sometimes I would listen to the music of the wind, breathing its sad melody on the mid-night air, till my heart was oppressed with sorrow ; and the wood ! what a strange ghostly sighing came from thence !

“ A hollow, hollow, hollow sound,  
As in that dreamy roar  
When distant billows boil and bound  
Along a shingly shore—  
But the ocean brim was far aloof,  
A hundred miles or more.”\*

My guardian was absent in London, and his aunt remained at the Castle in charge of me ; occasionally she presented herself in my room to make formal inquiries as to my progress, and to see that I was properly attended to.

She considered it a duty, and she was always very rigid in the performance of what she considered such, but beyond cold “ duty,” her code of morals did not extend.

Beevor’s manner had become so disagreeable,

\* Hood.

that I could not endure her presence. There was a restlessness, an irritability about her, for which I was at a loss to assign a reason; unless it was the dislike she entertained for the dull life, which she necessarily led at this country residence. I noticed that she did not associate much with the other servants, and to use a homely phrase there seemed "no love lost between them," and I understood her time was chiefly passed roaming about in the state apartments, or reading novels in her own room.

Her attendance upon me was evidently forced, and her flippant off-hand manner was peculiarly unpleasant in a sick room. Having found all her attempts at worming herself into my confidence to be of no use, she appeared to resent the reserved way in which I behaved to her, by an insolence which, at times, was intolerable.

With such a nurse, I should have been but poorly tended, had it not been for Mrs. Bounce, who it seems had "taken a fancy" to me, and kindly came several times a-day to see how I was, and during her spare time would come and sit with me.

How cheering her visits were! she looked

so nicely in her shining black satin dress, and her cap so prettily trimmed with white ribbons, that the sight of her alone was pleasant.

She would sit by my bedside, and holding my wasted fingers in her soft plump hand, talk to me so kindly, that I never was happy till I had kissed her round rosy cheek, and made her eyes twinkle with a feeling .

“ ——— of sadness and longing  
That is not akin to pain,  
And resembles sorrow only  
As the mist resembles rain.”

She was thinking of her departed children I am sure, and loved nothing better than to fancy me one of them for the time ; dear, good old Mrs. Bounce.

Then she would tell me long stories of the past, offer remarks upon passing events, and speculate upon the future in a style so peculiarly her own—the language, I mean, that she often sent me diving down under the bed-clothes in uncontrollable fits of laughter. She would make the strangest mistakes (Mrs Malaprop was nothing to her), and with a gravity that was in itself titillating.

\* Longfellow.



Once she told me I looked like a "skerring-ton," a perfect "egg," which on enquiry, I found to mean "skeleton," for the first word, and "hag" the second.

"Come, now," she would say, "your stomick requires 'sport, try an eat some of this helligo," this was a harricot of superior preparation.

Dainty cakes, too, she brought of her own making, thinking them better for me than "the messes and mommacks of that dirty French chap," as she insultingly called his lordship's excellent *chef*.

"For her part," she added, "she never could bear to touch a bit of vittels that he'd been mommicking with."

Drinking too light nourishing things, and refreshing "ades" of every description she strongly recommended.

"Have 'e dranked it all?" she cried one day, after giving me a glassful of the latter. "Come, drink a drop more, sup it all up, and don't 'e be such a Miss Finnick."

Then Miss Finnick would pinch the speaker's plump cheeks, and declare the "ade" was so good, she must have a great quantity made,

which would delight the old lady exceedingly and she would cry :

“That ’e shall, poor body—the beautifullest as can be made.”

If she had a fault, dear soul, it was a quickness of temper, when brought in contact with “slow bodies.”

“Stee-u-pid been !” I heard her once saying to a drone of a housemaid. “Stee-u-pid been ! my blood boil to see ’e a drawling, and crawling ’bout your work, ’stead of goin’ sprack about a thing, and gettin it done off tidy—such bodies drive me crazy.” And she set to work herself with a bustling energy which shamed the delinquent.

It is a pity more people are not made of the stuff that she was—honesty, activity, and goodwill—and God’s blessing on them ; you can understand what they mean, and as to their tempers—pepper in the moral temperament is like seasoning to the dish, gives it flavour ; you can’t take liberties with it, but all the better for that ; I should not respect a person who could not show temper if *occasion required*.

With such an ever kind nurse, I gradually

recovered sufficiently to sit up, and sometimes to saunter through the gallery, looking at my favourite pictures, though I soon grew faint and weary, and my head swam with giddiness, obliging me to give up straining my eyes.

At length, milder weather came, and during the few hours when the sun shone warmly on the terrace, I was permitted to creep out, with strict injunctions to keep in the sunshine.

## CHAPTER XVII.

" 'Tis not for fear ; but anger,—that thy cheeks  
Blush for pure shame, to counterfeit our roses.

HENRY VI. *First Part.*

" How oft, when pressed to marriage, have I said,  
Curse on all laws but those which love has made.  
Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,  
Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies.  
Let wealth, let honour, wait the wedded dame,  
August her deed, and sacred be her fame ;  
Before true passion all those views remove,  
Fame, wealth and honour ! what are you to Love ?"

ELOISA TO ABELARD.

It was on one of these balmy days in early spring when the snow-drops and crocuses were giving place to violets, and the tender leaves were just appearing on the trees, showing a tip of delicate green here and there on

every branch, that in my midday walk on the terrace, I was joined by my guardian.

His lordship had but just returned, and this was my first interview with him, since the day of his wife's death.

He advanced to meet me, and offered his arm to support my feeble steps, drawing my shawl closer round me as he did so, and saying :

"Upon my life, Isola, I think you're handsomer than you used to be, your illness has fined you down nicely ; but don't blush," he added, observing my heightened colour, "you must try and get rid of that silly habit."

I hated his flatteries so much, that it was more with anger than with shame I blushed, but he mistook my feelings and went on.

"I really could not have believed that my little ward would have grown up so handsome. Let me tell you, Isola, that you are getting a devilish fine woman—will be in time, at least. 'Pon my life," and he drew himself a little from me, and gazed full in my face, " 'pon my life, I wouldn't mind having you myself !"

How I recoiled from him ! but he was

strangely insensible to all manifestations of dislike, and in spite of the repugnance I exhibited, both to him and his society, he still went on.

“ By the bye, Isola, that mystery was never cleared up about St. Leger, come now, tell me like a good girl, why you would not have him.”

I remained silent.

“ Was it—was it that you liked another? it seemed so odd that a fellow like that who generally carries all before him should be repulsed by a young thing like you; I can’t understand it, unless—and it has struck me since that—(stranger things happen you know) you had taken a fancy to your old guardian!”

“ Lord D’Arville!” I exclaimed with a start.

“ Come, now, no nonsense, Isola bella, I can understand all your young modesty, and so forth; but I had much rather, as I’ve guessed your feelings, that you confess them at once—it would be much more satisfactory to me.”

“ I am perfectly amazed,” I cried, “ I don’t know what your lordship means.”

"Don't you?" he said, with a slight laugh, "very likely—a clever actress we should make! However, I know what *you* mean, you deep little puss, and am quite ready to meet you half way. That will do—won't it?"

"I again repeat, I cannot understand you, Lord D'Arville," I exclaimed with some irritation in my tone.

"You won't understand; it's the way with you women when you want to have your vanity gratified, by hearing a tender confession from a man on his bended knee; you ape the simplicity of doves, and expect cooing and wooing to follow. You see I'm up to the tricks of you women—you're deep as ——— everyone of you."

And looking at me with a singularly impudent and disagreeable expression of countenance, he walked on for some minutes in silence.

My own feelings were getting confused, while my mind was becoming painfully enlightened. I longed to escape, but it was impossible, we were at the further end of the terrace, and I had to walk back with him; presently my guardian continued.

"I see I must be plain with you, you little tyrant. Well then, supposing you to have taken this *odd* fancy—I've no objection to make you Lady D'Arville—my wife in fact."

I turned deadly faint and ill, how I supported myself I do not know.

"Bless me!" he cried, seeing my pallor. "You need not be so overcome, poor girl; but that's the only apprehension I have. You have no *retenue*, and this exhibition of feeling on every occasion would never do. Try and be more composed, Isola. What are you afraid of? I am not angry with you, though such a reception of my offer, if flattering, is rather perplexing."

"I, too, am perplexed," I said at length, trying to be calm, "and cannot think what could have induced your lordship to pay me such a compliment."

"Well, well, my dear, never mind, I've done it, and that's enough."

"But I fear, my dear Sir," I pursued timidly, "I fear you are mistaken."

"Mistaken? How so? You don't think me so verdant as to be mistaken in matters of this kind, do you? I flatter myself I'm a



tolerable judge of women ; had experience enough at all events."

And he drew himself up more stiffly, throwing out his chest, and curling his whisker round his finger in a graceful manner, " and as to you," he continued, " an unsophisticated blushing young rosebud like you ! 'Pshaw ! I read your heart, my little angel, like a book."

" Indeed, indeed, Lord D'Arville," I cried, in a choking voice, " you *are* mistaken in this case. I—I—do not wish to marry—at all—yet. I have seen so little of the world."

" Well, but you'll see enough of it when you're married ; there's another reason for your doing so without delay."

" But I should like—you said I should be presented this season."

" Of course ; well, and cannot Lady D'Arville be presented just as well as Miss Brand, eh ?"

" Yes," I answered, confused at this evasion, and hardly knowing what I said, " but I'm so young."

" Young ! so much the better. Why, you did not think I was going to marry an *old*

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woman, did you? Not quite such a fool as that either. No, you're just the age I like, and I can bring you into capital training yet."

Detestable man! what could I say; what do, to express my hatred and disgust!

Trembling and ill, I walked on, and he continued:

"No, no; we must have no nonsense. You'll be a good little girl, and make me a very nice wife, and I would not mind laying a wager that you became only too fond of me in time. Ah! you pout; but pouting's becoming to your lips—woman's art again!"

I hurried on to escape him, but laying his hand on my arm, he detained me.

"Stop, Isola; look up at the Castle; cast your eye round this wide domain. What finer residence could you desire? now just oblige me by looking at it from this point of view, and tell me if it's not worth being mistress of."


"Vulgar creature!" I thought, "to imagine I would sell myself for such possessions." I think I *looked* the disgust I felt, and he began to suspect he had overestimated his influence with me.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "you don't seem to appreciate the compliment I pay you; for I can tell you what, a girl has not got the offer of a coronet everyday. At any rate, you're looking sulky as the devil, which I take the liberty of observing, is anything but becoming."

"I do not consider it at all kind, Lord D'Arville, for you, in your position of guardian, to insult me in this way," was all the answer I could make.

"Insult? What next? By Jove! women are slippery eels to deal with! Here are you refusing an eligible offer in the first place, for no reason whatever apparently; then blushing up to the eyes whenever I look at you, giving me the most flattering notions, and then, when I come forward in an honourable and handsome manner, offering you my hand and heart, and a noble, position paying you the highest compliment a man can pay to a woman, instead of being gratified as any other woman would be, you turn round upon me, and behave in this unaccountable fashion; but I suspect you're an arch coquette."

I shook my head, while I wiped away a few tears which would creep down.



"Come, Isola, now," he said, in a voice he intended to be fascinating—stopping the while in front of me, and detaining my hand in his, "come, now, what objection can you have to me? Is it because I am a little older than yourself? You would not surely be such a maniac as to wish to marry a mere boy? If you did, I can only tell you, that as your guardian, I could not let you commit such a folly. No, far better is it in my opinion, for a girl to marry a man of mature age, whom she can look up to for guidance."

"A young man," I answered, "is frequently as well able to direct and guide, as an old one—sometimes better, it depends upon his character. Some old men require guidance for themselves, and in such, I should have no confidence."

My guardian eyed me sharply.

"And do you mean to say that you consider me one of that class? Upon my word, Miss Isola, you're improving—getting complimentary, but it won't do; mystery as you are, I'll make you out. Coquetting is all very well, to a certain point, but it will be time soon that we should understand each other clearly; and

then, whether it goes with the grain, or against it, you'll find that you'll have to accede to my wishes—so you'd better do so with a good grace, at once," he added, in conclusion.

"Lord D'Arville," I said, with some dignity, "will find it a difficult matter to bend Miss Brand to his will."

"Indeed! I fancy you'll find yourself mistaken on that point; hitherto, Miss Isola, I have considered you as seeking my alliance, and considered I was doing you a kindness in making the proposals I have done. If, however, for reasons of my own, I am desirous that you should accept them, you must do so!"

"Never!"

My guardian laughed. "I'll tell you what, no woman yet, ever refused me, and I'm not going to allow you to do so—my mind's like a rock when it's once made up, and since you are disposed to be so troublesome, I may as well caution you at once not to go too far in opposing my wishes; consent to be Lady D'Arville—well and good—refuse, and expect to suffer for your obstinacy; so mind what you're about."

"I do not see what I have to fear from your displeasure," I said, proudly.

"You will, then, before long; I'm not a man to be thwarted in any of my plans, and I shall find means to bring even Miss Brand into humble subjection."

A difficult task, I thought, as I turned in at an open window. As I did so, I glanced up at the window above, where, behind the muslin curtain, was standing Beevor, and from her position, and the time we had been standing beneath, I was persuaded that she had heard every word of the latter part of the conversation.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*Agrippina.* " . . . C'est à moi qu'on donne une rivale,  
Bientôt, si je ne romps ce funeste lien,  
Ma place est occupée, et je ne suis plus rien."

BRITANNICUS.

SCARCELY had I reached my own room, and sat down to recover my thoughts, when the door was unceremoniously opened by Beavor, and without making any apology for the intrusion, she entered.

Never shall I forget her face at that moment; it was of a livid white, every feature stood out as if chiselled, and her eyes flashing with an unholy light, were positively frightful in their expression.

Her sudden entrance, and the strange look she wore, took me so much by surprise, that I could only wait in silence for an explanation.

"What is this?" she cried, almost shrieked,

in a voice of most unnatural tone ; “ has he been asking you to marry him—eh ? has he ? ”

I made no reply, and coming close up to where I was sitting, she repeated the question, laughing hysterically.

“ Ha—ha—ha ! he wished you to become Lady D’Arville, didn’t he ? the mistress of his splendid Castle, and his wide domains—ha—ha ! ”

Her laugh was so harsh and fearful, that it sent a shudder through my frame as I listened. I could only look at her in wonderment and alarm, and presently she threw herself upon a sofa, and I thought she was going into a fit, but she started up again almost immediately, and went on in a wild exciting manner.

“ Wouldn’t you have him ? —such a charming creature as you are, such a handsome, accomplished young paragon !

“ Just the person to be Lady D’Arville ! A fit mate for that fascinating creature, that proud old sinner ! Why won’t you have him ? It would be a very good thing for you, I should think.”

“ I do not wish to have your opinion upon the subject—you had better leave the room,



Beever," I said, speaking in as calm a tone as I could command, for doubts of her sanity, somewhat alarmed me in my weak state of health.

She did not heed me, and continued, "No, I shall not go yet—I want to talk to you—suppose he obliges you to marry him, what will you do then?"

I replied to her oddly that I did not see how that matter could concern her, and begged her to spare me all impertinent remarks.

"Not concern me?" she shrieked. "ha—ha—ha! well never mind—can he tell you what he loves you?" she asked in a lower tone, and with an itching smile upon her face: receiving no answer she proceeded.

"I shouldn't think you'd like to marry a man who did not care for you—would you? you must be particularly desirous of a husband if you would. You'd better make a friend of me, for I could tell you some interesting little facts about that gentleman—shall I?"

"Be silent, or leave the room."

"Ha! ha—you're offended at my suggesting the idea that he might not love you after all? vanity touched? is that it? but perhaps he has no love in his old shrivelled heart to give."

I told her she seemed strangely interested in an affair which certainly did not concern her, that I thought her conduct very unbecoming, and that if she did not drop the subject, I should speak to Lady Bernard.

What a lightning glance flashed from beneath the thunder cloud of her brow! She looked for a moment like a tigress about to spring upon me, and I did not feel safe alone with her.

"You would dare?" she hissed out.

Summoning to my aid all my courage by a great effort, for I felt becoming every moment less able to sustain this combat of words, I said quietly, "I know no reason why I should not do so, if there is no other way of putting a stop to your extraordinary behaviour."

She laughed derisively, and said a great deal which I did not hear, for I felt very faint, and the singing sound in my ears, prevented my hearing distinctly, but at last she left the room, at the very moment that my good friend Mrs. Bounce was coming in to look after me. I just distinguished her through the film that was spreading over my eyes, and in another

moment lay in her arms, in a state of utter unconsciousness.

\* \* \* \*

Many were the lamentations I heard from the old lady, when I recovered.

"Poor crittur," was one of them, "poor extenuated crittur! what have 'em been doing to 'e? Ven'uous wretches a bringin' 'e to this! slaughterin' of 'e like a lamb. And that 'ere body what's she been a sayin'? Sim to me she's been giving you some of her sauce, a imperent, stuck up, outrageous vixen. I'd like—well—well—how d'ye feel now, chinky?"

"Better—much better, thank you, dear Mrs. Brown. I am very weak and silly, and could not help this. I assure you, Beatrix started me dreadfully with her violence."

"She did?—did she? that body shall pack off that she shall, for no doubt she's no better than she should be, from many years of her behaviour. Is it a decent thing in a Christian house for the women to be a reading inter books and—"

"Enough, dear Mrs. Brown."

"You sure it can't say to 'em and 'em."

"Indeed! she never told me that she knew anything but English."

"Tell you! no, there's a pretty deal she'd never tell you, I'd be bound; and better for you not to know," added the good dame, significantly.

"There certainly is something very mysterious about Béevor," I said. "I cannot make her out at all."

"Aye—aye—you can't, but I can; and 'tis an insult to me, in my persition, to see her brought here as she was, afore you came—not a word said to me, but sent here to fling about her petticoats in my face, and scoff and scoff at everythink, and scort up the carpets in her tantrums, and look like vinegar over her vittles, enough to take away one's appletite. Howsomever, I ain't agoing to stand it, and my lady shall tramp off, bag and baggage, pretty quick. So there, darling, lay your head on my shoulder, and try and get a nap of sleep."

I did as I was bid, and slept sweetly on her dear bosom.

\* \* \*

Life at the Castle, just then, was exceed-

ingly monotonous. Only one visitor came to vary it, and this was a strange visitor, truly—one whom I never should have expected to see in the lordly halls of D'Arville—namely, Mr. Sniggleby.

On repairing to the blue drawing-room, one day, to await the summons for dinner, I found this vulgar person lounging upon one of the satin couches.

I started with the surprise, and he rose nimbly, and approached me.

"My dear Miss," he exclaimed, "how do you do?"

I bowed, and replied civilly to his question.

"Nice place to live at, this. I feel myself 'at home' in a house of this description, and, no doubt, you do likewise, Miss. One feels the bigger for living in a big house, doesn't one?"

I was lost in astonishment at the reason which had thrust this creature into the drawing-room, when he ought properly to have been consigned to the servants' hall, or steward's room, and was meditating an instantaneous retreat, when my guardian entered the room, and stopping me at the door,

said: "Isola, allow me to present Mr. Sniggleby to you," and dinner being announced shortly afterwards, he actually gave me into the man's care, to be taken down to table, he himself going before us with Lady Bernard.

Mr. Sniggleby sat at the edge of his chair, in a most uncomfortable manner—in a style which I doubted his sitting in "at home;" and spread abroad his flat, greasy hands, and squeezed them up again nervously; twitched his face, screwed his mouth, and exhibited every symptom of being excited and ill at ease.

When addressed by his host, he answered in an obsequious tone; but I noticed that, as the wine took effect, his manner became more familiar, and before Lady Bernard and I left the room, he had assumed a style of addressing his noble friend, which that gentleman would not have tolerated from others of his acquaintance.

Lady Bernard, too, was more condescending than I should have expected, and I could not help asking her, when in the drawing-room once more, the cause of the honour paid to a person whom I understood to be only an agent, or something of that kind. She drew herself up.

"Lord D'Arville has his reasons, no doubt, for being civil to his man of business," she said, "and it would be only good taste in you to take your cue from his lordship."

Sneaking, contemptible policy !

The gentlemen did not join us till very late, and then I noticed that my guardian looked thoughtful and annoyed, while Mr. Sniggleby, from wine, or some other cause, appeared pleased and jovial. He came up to me, rubbing his hands, and smiling as he asked me if I liked music.

I answered him coolly enough. Lord D'Arville appeared to be noticing us.

"Come, Isola," he exclaimed, "give us a song—play, or do something."

"Pray do, my dear Miss," urged Sniggleby. "I'm dying to hear your swan-like notes—it will recall old times."

I did not wish old times recalled by him, and his allusion brought to my mind a scene, painful to me at the time, and in which there was much of mystery. It struck me that I ought to have mentioned the incident in the Champs Elysées to my guardian, and the present seemed a favourable moment for re-

ferring to it ; but how to introduce it, I hardly knew.

Lord D'Arville seemed impatient at my not complying immediately with his request that I should sing ; he rose, and crossing the room, came up to where I was sitting.

"What is the matter with you ?" he asked, angrily, though in an under tone. "What are you giving yourself these airs about ? I desire you to behave yourself civilly to my guests. Why can't you sing ?"

"Your lordship must excuse me this evening."

"You won't oblige me ? but you'd better beware, Miss Isola ; you've given me sufficient cause for being displeased with you already, and if you persist in a line of conduct so opposed to my wishes, you will have reason for rueing it one of these days. Now, no nonsense, but sing as you are desired."

I went off to bed as soon as possible after this speech—sing, I could not.

On the following morning, I received an order from my guardian to attend him in the library. I anticipated a rebuke for my conduct of the previous evening, but determined



to tell his lordship that I considered his wishing me to sing for the amusement of a low creature like Sniggleby as a positive insult, and then to inform him of the strange behaviour of that individual in Paris.

When I entered the room at the appointed hour, I found both gentlemen sitting there.

"There, my lord," Sniggleby was saying, "you're a happier man than you were yesterday—now, ain't you? Yes, yes, Tom S. is the man to deal with a gentleman, and you'll always find me yours, most accommodating and convenient."

Several papers were lying before them, which Lord D'Arville pushed on one side when he perceived me.

"Then, Sniggleby," he said, rising to give the latter his *congé*, "everything is understood?"

"Perfectly, my lord; and I suppose I may now prepare to take my departure?"

"Oh, no hurry about that—suit your own convenience—glad to have you here, my good fellow—you know that, of course."

"He! he! very kind, I'm sure;" and bowing and grinning, the odious creature—

the bugbear of my childhood—took his departure, casting the while a sly, sidelong glance from his sore eyes upon my unfortunate self.

A silence of a few minutes followed upon his exit, during which I stood very erect, feeling very “grand,” conscious that Lord D’Arville was observing my demeanour; and I was determined not to yield one point, say what he might.

To my surprise, his tone, when he commenced speaking, was quite different to what I had anticipated. He said very quietly, and averting his eyes when I looked up into his face :

“Do you know, Isola, that you’re a very silly girl not to take a hint? Why couldn’t you lay aside your dignity for once, and condescend to honour that—gentleman, as he requested, with a song? You saw I wished it.”

“But you ought not to have wished it, Lord D’Arville.”

“I ought not? pretty reprovener! Well, I’ll admit the fellow’s a snob, but one must hold a candle to a certain person sometimes.”

“That is a policy I detest.”

“A strong expression, Miss Brand, and you show by it, great ignorance of the world.”

"That is possible; but I am desirous of telling your lordship my *reason* for disliking that person."

"Well, if you can assign a 'reason' for anything you do or think, you're an altered character."

"From my earliest years I hated him."

Lord D'Arville laughed loudly.

"Just as I thought—impulse—all impulse. Why, girl, you've no *reason* in you."

"But let me tell you, Sir—"

"Nonsense—nonsense! I can guess what you're referring to—"

"Indeed? I do not think your lordship knows the matter to which I allude."

"I do. You are going to tell me about—" he hesitated, "about his officiousness in wishing to see you home once, when you had lost your way in Paris."

"I did not know that you had ever heard of that adventure of mine."

"I dare say not; but, you see, I was better informed than you supposed."

I was puzzled at seeing this mysterious affair thus simplified, but still felt far from convinced of its being the right solution of the enigma.

"What could have made Mr. Sniggleby take such an interest in me?" I asked.

"Why, his interest in *me*, I should imagine. You didn't flatter yourself with the belief that you had attracted his attention by your charms, did you?"

Receiving no answer from me, my guardian continued :

"It strikes me that you rate your attractions too highly, Miss Isola ; St. Leger wasn't good enough for you, nor my humble self ; and I suppose you count upon receiving universal homage, and think that nothing under a prince of the blood royal will be good enough for you."

"Believe me, Lord D'Arville, such ambitious dreams have never been mine."

"I'm glad to hear it, for you have a good chance of being disappointed, if you have been entertaining such ideas. You little know the unstable ground on which you stand, young lady ; and if you fancy yourself a person of position and fortune, you are deeply deceived."

There was no occasion for his lordship to appear pleased at this view of my prospects, but a satanic look of gratification crossed his face as he spoke to me ; he continued,

“It is not worth while to damp the ardour of your imagination, or darken your visions of the future by any explanations now ; but to put a check upon your vanity and conceit, it may be as well to inform you that you are nobody at all, that I am your best friend, and that if you persist in refusing my well-meant offer, which is the only chance you are likely to have of acquiring a decent position in society, you are your own enemy. What object can I have in view but your good ? There are hundreds of girls I might marry any day, if I felt so inclined, and if I am fool enough in my kindness to sacrifice myself and my own inclinations for the sake of improving your position and circumstances, I, at least, deserve some acknowledgment, or at all events, credit for my good feeling.”

Long I pondered upon these words, they haunted me in my solitude by day, and in the silent watches of the night. “You are nobody at all” rang in my ears, and before my eyes came the long-remembered sneer of Mr. Sniggleby. The favourite remarks, too, of Lady Bernard about “mixed races” and “pure blood” came to mind, and with a burning heart I asked myself “what, and who am I ?”

My father was General Sir Marmaduke Brand, and I never heard of a stain being on his name ; my mother—my mother—stay my heart, stay—I had never seen her it is true, but Inez, good kind Inez had . . . . . what horrid thought like the flap of a dark wing crossed my brain then ? Could it be ? No—no—away with that thought, or away with the image of Inez from my memory for ever. Was she so vile ? and my father, that white-haired man, could he—he ! — my soul almost loathed him.

If it was so—what was I ? I shrank within myself.

Could I go forth into the world with the scorching sear of “bastard” on my brow ! The wretched evidence of a parent’s crime ! Rather die ten thousand deaths than live with that cursed brand upon me.

“Honour thy father and thy mother.” Could I obey that commandment ! were my parents worthy of honour ? Bah !

Like a leaden weight, heavy and heavier still, such thoughts as these oppressed me, coming down like a dense cloud upon my spirit, till all was dark and dreary—dreary.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"She breathed in sleep a lower moan,  
And murmuring, as at night and morn,  
She thought, 'My spirit is here alone,  
Walks forgotten, and is forlorn.'"

MARIANA IN THE SOUTH.

"Then, most musical and solemn,  
Bringing back the olden times,  
With their strange unearthly changes,  
Rang the melancholy chimes."

LONGFELLOW.

A PRESSING invitation from the Comptons to attend Evelyn's wedding was declined.

Lady Bernard said decidedly "no" with a screwing up of her rigid features, which showed that *her* mind was made up, and Lord D'Arville said, "of course not," and tossed Leila's pretty note contemptuously over the table.

I hardly knew whether to be sorry or glad ; a strange, cold apathy took possession of me, I thought I must float with the tide, and let it bear me to sorrow or joy, it would be all one.

For a long time, I saw no one at the Castle but my coarse-minded guardian whose presence was, for many reasons, hateful to me ; and his stiff, reserved, cold-blooded aunt. The narrow-minded views of life and everything in it which she entertained, made her at no time a very pleasant companion for the young, and her recent quarrel with my kind friends the Comptons, had contributed to alienate me still more from her.

As far as thought and sympathy were concerned, I lived alone : if I painted, or sang, or played, there was no one either to approve or censure ; the only being who would have done either had he been near me, was far away—I knew not where ; and thus left to my own resources for amusement and happiness, I found myself becoming restless and irritable, a prey to gloomy thoughts and sad forebodings.

Everything looked dark around me, and my spirit seemed in shadow ; how long was this state of things to last ?



How many years was I to remain an inmate of that grand but most dreary abode, the cold icy splendour of which, sent a chill through my heart whenever I thought of its owner !

I no longer cared to mount my beautiful "Hassan ;" my energy and love of action were gone—I thought for ever ; and all I did was to saunter on the terrace, and in solitude nurse my sorrowful memories, and indulge in bitter anticipations of the future ; what part could I ever play in life, a nameless nobody, a being from whom society would shrink :—the very thought of myself sickened me.

Nature though looked beautiful ; the woods presented lovely pictures of sylvan beauty, and the stately Castle gardens were a show-place in the neighbourhood. From the terrace, I looked down upon them, and was compelled to acknowledge that their luxuriant loveliness did me good.

Statues, which in the winter, seemed to stand shivering in their nakedness, now peeped out from amongst clustering bowers, and the delicate tendrils of parasite plants half wreathed their snowy forms. The grounds, too, which at Christmas looked so black and gloomy, re-

flecting only the dark branches of the fir, or the cypress, now gleamed in the sun-rays, and threw back again, the sapphire tint of heaven ; birds warbled on every bough, while flowers, sweet flowers threw their fragrance on the passing breeze, and butterflies, and bees, and myriads of little buzzing creatures which filled the air with a dreamy, tremulous sound, seemed proclaiming their happiness.

And I would sit on the terrace, inhaling the balmy air, and drinking in these sweet summer sounds, till the great clock in the central tower, would strike the hour of noon, and as the last stroke died away, the chimes would burst forth in a gush of melody. O, those magical chimes ! floating far, far away over the "mere," and into the shadowy wood, and over lea and upland ; it seems as if in thinking of their sweet sad melody I heard them still !

"Robin Adair" was one of the airs they played, and I never hear it now, but something of the old feeling comes over me ; the feeling of sadness and solitude which oppressed me as I sat on the broad stone terrace, and the sense of strange companionship those voices

of the air gave me, as their chiming melody broke on the deep stillness of the scene.

Very sad I felt ; old recollections of sunny islands in the West, and those gorgeous skies beneath which I first saw the light, would rise before me, my father, my unknown mother, my childhood's friends ; and then came other scenes, nearer and nearer, and gradually the skies seemed darkening, till I felt getting colder and colder in their reflected gloom.

And the thought of my guardian so chilled me ! the position in which I stood to him, with that dire threat hanging over me !

Since our stormy interview on that same terrace, he had been silent to me on the subject of his unwelcome proposal, perhaps, because I was ill, or Lady Bernard might have influenced him, (though this did not seem very likely) it was more probable that he trusted to the course of events, causing a change of feeling in me, and was biding his time in patience.

I felt, however, that be it as it may, my dislike seemed only to increase ; to yield to his wishes, I never would, for all the titles, the

castles, or the parks in England. I would rather wander forth a wretched outcast, the wide world over, or lay me down and die at once, than give my hand with loathing to a man whom I felt, in my own mind, was a villain.

The thought, too, of his dying wife, sickened me ; however guilty she might have been, and I had no inclination to deny her extreme guilt, yet I could not but think, that he, in his pride and sternness, had been guilty towards the poor, weak woman, he should have loved and cherished.

I fear, that at this time, self engrossed far too much of my thoughts ; I was ever dwelling on my singular and unpleasant position, and wishing with all the ardour of youth, that I might see some other path opening before me, yet strangely enough Mr. St. Leger rarely found a place in my reveries.

His offer, if accepted, would have prevented all my present difficulties, but never for a moment did a single regret arise at my refusal thereof ; if it came into my mind at all, it was as something unpleasant, which I was very

sorry had ever come to disturb, even for an instant, the harmony of our friendship; this, however, I felt assured, was unimpaired.

Now and then I found another person rising in remembrance, and whenever that happened, I felt my cheek burning, and I grew angry, and endeavoured to dismiss him from my thoughts, for which purpose I generally sought for my "Shakspeare," and with Viola, Rosamond, and sweet Imogen, found charming companionship; but sometimes I would find my thoughts straying from the page, a vision would rise before me. A pair of kindly eyes would seem looking in my face, with that anxious, earnest gaze, I had met but once.

A voice, whose heart-breathed, richly modulated tones, had spoken in accents of gentlest kindness and sympathy, rang in my ears evermore: it seemed mingled with the sighing zephyrs, which played with the roses, with the plash of the sparkling water at the fountain, and with the falling chime of "Robin Adair."

My lips would half whisper the question, "Where is he?" it was but a breathing, it

was not audible, it was born with a smile, and expired in a sigh.

Thoughts of him came with such sweetness over me, that it was impossible to resist the temptation of harbouring them at times in my heart ; they crept in so stealthily, and in such strange guise that they often took me unawares, and would engross me completely ere I became conscious of their presence. Strive as I would to resist their entrance, they came.

A magic circle seemed drawn round Mr. Grey, a bright halo encircled him, which extended to everything in any way connected with him ; investing the book he had touched or marked, the flowers he had gathered, the very shawl he had carried for me, with a peculiar interest, something approaching to sanctity.

Like a sweet odour, his memory floated in the atmosphere of my mind, and it was cherished, notwithstanding my efforts to the contrary.

I needed some palliative amongst so many mortifications as I had to endure.

One thing, however, was satisfactory, in

spite of other annoyances ; I was relieved from the unpleasant attendance of Beevor. That lady departed suddenly, after an interview she had with my guardian, which was supposed by the other domestics to be of a tempestuous nature, inasmuch as that, although it took place in the library, the thick walls of which prevented much being heard outside, of what passed within, yet, that his deep, angry tones, and her shrill, passionate ones, were audible in the corridor.

Great rejoicing, I believe, there was in the servants' hall at her hasty departure, and Mrs. Bounce, as she gazed round, looked complacency itself.

"I can 'joy me meals, now," she would say, "since that upstart, Mrs. Consequence is bundled off ; my congestion's better, and my stomick isn't set upside down, by the sight of her 'cidulated looks. I hope, now, we shall get a more comfortabler person to tend on Missie."

She did get a very different young woman for the office—a country girl, the daughter of one of the tenants on the estate, and she

knew about as much of the requirements of a young lady, in the dressing department, as the *femme de chambre* of Boadicea might have done.

However, Grace was very intelligent and quick, and soon learned all that was necessary. She was a good-tempered, fresh-looking girl, with a sturdiness both of appearance and character, which was very amusing at times, and she was "sprack" enough to please even Mrs. Bounce.

Summer was now approaching, and Lord D'Arville, who had gone up to town for a short time, returned to the Castle to remain a few days, prior, as I understood, to removing to London for the season.

A vague hope flitted through my mind, that I should hear no more on the dreadful subject, and that his lordship only came down for the purpose of arranging with his aunt about my going to town likewise, having been given to understand that I was to be presented this season.

My hopes, however, were dispelled, when I ventured to speak to him upon the matter, reminding him of the said "presentation."



He did not answer for a minute or two, but continued his occupation of folding and sealing a letter ; at length, looking me steadily in the face, he said,

“ Well, you know on what conditions you can go, I am only waiting your consent, your answer ‘yes’ to the proposal I made you a little while ago, and I shall then have great pleasure in taking you to town.”

“ Your lordship may wait long enough then,” I said, disdainfully.

“ Very well, my dear, very well,” was his reply, “ I can wait—see which will be tired soonest ?”

My heart sank at this—his purpose, then of forcing me to marry him, was unaltered !

Shortly afterwards, I was informed that my guardian intended returning to London immediately, and that Lady Bernard was to take me back to Serle.

What a dreary prospect ! if D’Arville Castle was so lonely with its beautiful gardens, its stately apartments, filled with articles of vertu, and gems of taste, its exquisite pictures, and its sweetly chiming bells, which I had become so familiar with, as quite to love, what

would Serle be, with its uninteresting level park, and its common-place mansion of common-place rooms, which had no art, no romance, no anything pleasing about them ! no soft, silky-haired, blue-eyed Rose there now, but only the frigid, unsentimental, matter-of-fact Lady Bernard, with her seventeenth century mind, and manners.

On a fiery, impetuous nature, one vexation, one disappointment, will have the effect that fifty have, on a phlegmatic temperament ; and under the pressure of the annoyances of the last few months, I was sinking into a state of indescribable melancholy.

I saw no prospect of change for the better, feeling sure that my guardian was determined to make me bend to his will at all risks ; and I also strongly suspected that Lady Bernard upheld him in his determination, and only waited a good opportunity to urge the matter with me in conversation.

Should I have strength for the contest before me ? Could I hold out, alone and unaided against the forces which might be brought against me ? In hours of weakness,

I felt sadly nervous at the prospect, but at other times I could say,

“The star of the unconquered will,  
He rises in my breast,  
Serene, and resolute, and still,  
And calm, and self-possessed.”

My guardian's manner towards me, was cold and haughty, I did not mind that, preferring it infinitely to his repulsive efforts at pleasing ; but it cost me some pains to preserve my own manner as calm and cool, as I wished, especially when in one of my gloomy moods.

A miserable fit of this sort, was on me one day, when I sat down to luncheon ; it was with difficulty I could maintain the appearance of cheerfulness which was expected of me, and I felt as if I should burst into tears, when the servant handed me a letter.

The very sight of a letter was refreshing, and this being in an unknown handwriting, quite excited me—and not unpleasurably either.

It was a delightful little mystery, and I turned it about, wondering whose could be

the free, careless, and somewhat tremulous hand, and the rather antiquated seal, which bore a coronet : at length, I broke the wax, and the contents of the letter were revealed to me.

I had better give it *verbatim*.

## CHAPTER XX.

" Sweet recreation barr'd, what doth ensue,  
But moody and dull melancholy  
(Kinsman to grief, and comfortless despair ;)  
Of pale distemperature, and foes to life ?"

COMEDY OF ERRORS.

" Dear Miss Brand,

" You'll think me a comical old body for writing to you, I dare say, but there is nothing to be had without asking for it, and being desirous of having the pleasure of your acquaintance, ' I make bold' as the rustics say, to write stating who I am, and my reasons for wishing to know you : the rest lies with yourself.

" Years ago, when I was a young blooming lassie, I knew your poor father ; we were children together, and very fond of each other ;

but in course of time the boy and girl became man and woman ; our paths lay in different directions ; so we parted, he went *his* way, I went mine.

“ Circumstances prevented my seeing or hearing anything of him for many years ; and when at last, tidings of him reached me, it was the sad news of his death.

“ Many have been the enquiries, which from time to time, I have made after his child, but it was not till last autumn that I obtained a clue to her.

“ A fit of illness and family affliction, have so selfishly engrossed me, that it is only now (rather late in the day) that I am able to tell her of the deep interest with which her name inspires me.

“ And now, my dear girl, I want you to come and see your father’s old friend directly. I heard a great deal about you yesterday, from your friends the Comptons, and am most anxious, from the report they give, to have the pleasure of your acquaintance without any delay.

“ I know your guardian very well. Tell him he is to bring you to me when he returns

to town, or stay, I'll enclose him a little note.

"I remain, my dear, very sincerely yours,  
"JANET RAVENSDEN."

Here was a new star arisen to cheer my dark horizon ! I trembled with excitement and pleasure ; but it was with a sinking sensation, I handed my guardian the little enclosure.

"What is this? Mother Ravensden, by Jove!" he exclaimed, after reading the note. "Humph," and he looked at me with a penetrating and most disagreeable glance. He gave the note a second perusal, and while he did so, I saw an expression of excessive annoyance steal over his countenance.

"Deuce is in these old women, I think," he muttered to himself.

Lady Bernard caught the uncomplimentary remark, and looked an indignant interrogatory ; her nephew did not vouchsafe her an explanation however, but asked her if she would be disengaged for half an hour, as he wished to speak to her. Her ladyship with sulky dignity told him, she did not know what he could have to say to an old woman

like her, but whatever it was, it must be said at once; she had engagements.

I accordingly retired.

Here was something so new and unexpected that I almost thought myself in a dream. This stranger-friend coming like a good fairy in a child's tale, to create such a change in my fortunes; it seemed almost too good to be real.

With what anxiety—what painful anxiety, I awaited the result of this conference, only one situated as I was, could guess.

Upon it seemed to hinge my future fate, and minutes appeared hours as I stood out upon a mossy bank in the shade of the fir-trees, whither I had gone to endeavour to regain composure.

I watched the fleecy clouds sailing through the blue ether, and apparently my thoughts were concentrated upon their changing forms, but I was comparing them with myself—tossed about by the wild winds, one of the “waifs and strays” of the world, and was wondering whither I should be driven by this fresh breeze.

A thousand hopes and fancies, rainbow-



dyed, and varying ever like the diversified patterns of the kaleidoscope, rose before me ; and the " great world," that mysterious, hitherto unexplored land, on the borders of which only I had stepped, loomed up in near perspective.

My heart responded to the warm touch of sympathy, expressed in the straight forward epistle of my unknown friend, and I thought with her kind, guiding hand, what pleasure, what happiness might be in store for me !

But these were not the only reflections that made my heart leap in my bosom. This was my father's friend—his childhood's playmate ; I should hear his name from partial lips ; I should hear the truth respecting my birth—that mystery would be cleared up, and oh ! how much she would have to tell me of that dear being whose name I bore, and perchance of my mother ! What a bond of sympathy there would be between us ! Our friendship would be hallowed as it were by these sacred remembrances, and it seemed a nearer and dearer tie for me than any I had yet known. But, then came the agitating query : " Is this good fortune really in store for me ? " it cannot

be : my guardian and his aunt will not so readily grant me my wishes ; the invitation to Evelyn's wedding came to mind, it will be " No " again, and " of course not," and a sickness came over me, as I pondered bitterly on my state of thralldom.

Some may say : " Why were you so discontented ? living in a luxurious home with no reasonable wish ungratified, why did you so ardently desire a change ? It was a morbid feeling, and you required some wholesome discipline to enable you to appreciate the advantages of your position."

I answer : I was not a mere materialist, I had a spiritual as well as a material nature : I had a heart beating in my bosom, the rich treasures of which, feelings of sympathy and affection, lay dammed up, and congealed, in the icy atmosphere in which I lived ; and I was like a flower in a cold cellar, turning pale for want of sunshine.

" Am I to accept this invitation ? " I asked my guardian with some trepidation, a few hours afterwards.

" Eh ? I don't know—shall think about it."

I went to Lady Bernard, who was in her room.

"My dear madam," I said, "can you tell me, whether or not I shall go on a visit to this lady, who has sent me such a kind invitation?"

A cloud was on her brow, which my question certainly did not remove.

"His lordship is the person to ask; how do I know what his plans may be."

"Oh! you *can* tell me, Lady Bernard," I said, "and why keep me in this suspense?"

She was silent for a few minutes, during which she was trying to thread a needle, seeing that she could not do it, I offered my services, and then in a coaxing manner repeated my question.

"Well, yes," was the answer, "I suppose you will have to go."

"Thank you—thank you!" I cried, then checking my manifestations of pleasure, which I recollected were not over polite under the circumstances, I said;

"You must not think me ungrateful, Lady Bernard, if I am pleased at the anticipation of this visit to town, you would have been as foolish when you were my age, would you not?"

The old lady was not certain upon this point, and as it was not a fact upon which I very particularly wished to be informed, I flew off to unbosom myself in the sympathizing ear of good old Mrs. Bounce.

"Good news !" I cried, as I rushed into her apartment, and told her "all about it" She twinkled her eyes a little, and made the philosophical observation, that :

"All things is for the best."

I told her it was not all for the best, as far as parting from her was concerned, and asked her if she could not manage to visit London, also. "It would be so delightful," I said, "to have you there, and I would mind that you were well taken care of, and saw everything that was to be seen."

"Bless you, dear," was her answer, "only I couldn't abide the ill-conveniency of getting there, and I'm sure the smoke an' smells of Lun'nun would turn my stomick ; howsomever, 'twill do you good, as you've been moped up here too long."

Very shortly, the bustle of preparation informed me that my hopes were about to be realized ; how it came about, that my stern

protector gave his sanction so readily to the proposal, puzzled me ; what made him grant me this indulgence ? I could not tell, and did not trouble myself to find out ; engrossed by its pleasurable anticipations, my mind had no room for thoughts of my guardian and his inconsistency of conduct. This new friend ! what a field for fancy she was !

But let her be young or old, handsome or ugly, it did not matter, I felt sure I should love her, indeed I imagined that I loved her already.

I bade farewell to my companions, the pictures, which had been my solace in many a weary hour, and to " St. Catherine reading," —(a copy of the one at Hampton Court), I made quite an affectionate adieu ; the sweetness and heavenly serenity of the face, with the sober, harmonious tone of the draperies, rendered it a pleasing study ; there was nothing glaring, nothing to dazzle in the tints, and gazing on the calm sweet face, was like looking on the pensive beauty of a still evening sky.

It seemed to quiet the surging waves of my troubled spirit, and I always felt happier while

contemplating its saint-like loveliness : to say " adieu " to it, was like parting from a friend.

The last scene with Mrs. Bounce was quite affecting.

" Well, then, good-bye, michild," she said, crying, " God bless ye, 'tis quite right as ye should see the world, an' go gallivanting a bit sometimes, an' may be ye'll get somebody as'll take care of 'e, and mind you get a good 'un, one of the right sort, not one of yer fanciful finnickin' chaps, they aint no good ; but a good, stirling, honest feller as'll make 'e a good husband, like my poor Dick—ah ! he was one of the right sort ! Good-bye ! lovey." And she gave me a kiss which kept me warm for the rest of the day.

Lady Bernard's leave-taking was frigid enough, and suggested the anxious thought "what would my welcome be like from my new friend, Janet Ravensden." These simple words, I am forgetting to say, stood for Janet, Countess Dowager of Ravensden.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"*Falstaff*. Your lordship, though not clean past your youth, hath yet some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltness of time; and I most humbly beseech your lordship, to have a reverent care of your health."

HENRY IV.

ON our arrival in town, we drove at once to Hertford Street, Mayfair, in which, since her widowhood, had been the dowager's residence, her son, the present Earl and his wife occupying the family mansion in Grosvenor Square.

My heart went pit-a-pat, beating in unison with the old-fashioned knocker, as it announced our arrival, and in a few minutes my guardian had handed me from the carriage, and I was in the house.

There were plenty of servants about, but a kindly voice cried out, "come up, my dear,"

and obeying the summons, I found myself ere I was aware of it, in the arms of the old lady, who had come to the stairhead to meet me.

My fancy had painted for me a fine venerable old dame of aristocratic bearing, with a pallid face, and snow white hair ; but the lady who now locked me in her arms so affectionately, did not bear any striking characteristics either of aristocracy or age, about her.

She had evidently been extremely good-looking once, and the brightness and animation of the expression of her face, so wonderfully outliving time and care, must in youth have made it extremely bewitching. But the look which was now most remarkable in her, was a mingling of shrewdness and kindness—extreme kindness : worldliness and unworldliness, if such a thing can be imagined.

She was gaily, even showily-dressed, for an old lady ; but somehow, the bright ribbons, and the rich shining satin, seemed to suit her ; and I doubt if a soberer costume would have been half so becoming.

“ Welcome! my dear girl,” she cried warmly “ I am so glad you’re come, I’ve been looking out anxiously for you ; and now, let me see



your face, lift your head. Bless me! how dark you are! Couldn't have believed it, poor Marmy's features, though: you're very like your poor father. O! Mr. Grim, how are you?" turning to Lord D'Arville.

I was amazed at hearing my guardian so familiarly addressed, and wondered how he would take it, but he only laughed as he answered,

"Pretty well, Lady Ravensden; I only want some of your inexhaustible spirits to carry me more cheerfully through life."

"Tut—man—it's your own fault if things don't run smooth; but I always told you you're too stiff in the back by half."

"I was sorry to hear your ladyship was ill a short time ago," said my guardian turning the conversation from himself.

"Yes! I had a regular croaking fit, terrible piece of business, only a wonder I'm alive: but I *am* you see, and am very thankful at being able to say so, and but for an occasional reminder in the shape of a sting, or twist of pain, I am as well as ever. Some of us old boats that are hauled up high and dry, are a long while going to pieces,"

and she laughed, "how are your lordship's timbers?" she asked, "they've been creaky a long time."

Lord D'Arville did not seem quite to like these allusions to the 'enemy,' for saying somewhat hastily "O! sea-worthy still," he turned to me, remarking that he was afraid I was very tired, and Lady Ravensden taking the hint, said I should be shown to my room.

My guardian shortly afterwards took his leave—promising to call the following morning.

The old lady and I had a little *tête-à-tête* dinner, during which she rattled away in conversation, asking a hundred questions, and making such witty comments upon my replies, that I was obliged to sharpen my intellects a little to keep pace with her; she was quite excited when she heard what a dull life I had been leading for some time past.

"Poor thing!" she cried, "it was enough to make you lose the partial use of your senses; sight, hearing, taste smell, and touch, require constant use, and you could have had no pleasure in exercising any of them, how

did you exist? I should have succumbed at once, I cannot live without excitement."

"O!" I answered, "I had plenty of books, work, pictures, musical instruments, and the loveliest imaginable walks and rides."

"But you had nobody to speak to? and you would grow mouldy unless your mind was aired occasionally by a little genial intercourse; shut up in yourself, your ideas become like clothes locked up in a box, and when taken out are old fashioned, musty, and injured from having been so long squeezed up in close quarters. No, there is nothing like seeing the world, moving about, and mixing freely in society—it rubs off the rust of prejudice, expands the mind, and enlarges the sympathies of our nature. Lady Bernard, from all I have heard, must be an exemplification of the truth of this, I do not call her existence, *living*, she does not half live."

"Not in one sense," I answered, "but then there is the life of action, and the life of thought—perhaps her's is the latter."

"If her youth had been one of action, in latter years she might fall back upon 'the Pleasures of Memory,' but if not, and the

stream had always flowed on in an uninterrupted flow, I can imagine nothing but sluggishness and stagnation to the mind, in such a case : no, take my advice my dear girl, see all you can, while you can, and do all that is in your power, while you have the ability to do it, and thus you will lay up a store of memories, and pleasant retrospection for the days when it may chance that sight and hearing fail you, and if you rightly profit by your experience, you will avoid many of the faults of age, you will not be selfish nor exacting, your mind will amuse itself, without requiring the attentions of others, and your heart full of large sympathies, will feel, and call forth, affection : but how I am running on !” she exclaimed, laughing, “ giving you a homily on old age, what a prosy, tiresome old woman, you’ll think me !—well, now to carry my theory into practice, what are we to do with ourselves this evening ?”

“ I must leave that to be determined by your ladyship.” I replied.

“ Well,” she continued, “ I declined one or two balls for to-night, thinking that after your journey you would be too tired to go,

but it's reception night at several houses, and we can look in at some of them if you like."

I wished her to consult her own inclinations, anything would be agreeable to me.

"Perhaps then, my dear, as you have not yet made your débüt, it would be better to wait till you've been presented, and we can go to the opera to-night, it will be a nice quiet amusement, and will not fatigue or excite you. It is a very good night, too, capital caste, Grisi, Mario, Tamburini, the whole set."

"Delightful, it will be a great treat."

So to the opera we went.

END OF VOL. I.

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